MAX MORRIS
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THE VICTORIAN ILLUSION

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I. The Problem of Victorianism

"*We throw aside too much, in making up our images of eras, that which is common to all eras. . . . So a sort of style settles upon an age, and, imprinting itself more than anything else in men's memories, becomes all that is thought of about it.*" (*Bagehot*, Physics and Politics).

EVERYTHING worth saying about the Victorian Age has been said too many times already—except, perhaps, the elusive truism that it never existed, or if it did, was never the same thing for two moments together. "Victorianism" has already joined that lengthening list of historical labels whose chief value is to provide undergraduates with titles for their essays—inspired generalisations used by brilliant historians as illuminating but deceptive spot-lights upon the historical stage, and abused by muddle-headed historians as though they were the whole truth, instead of a passing concentration upon some salient part of it. Hellenism, Middle Ages, Renaissance—these and similar terms are the historical forerunners of Victorianism, and they mean anything you like. From one point of view, Hellenism is the brightest light that has shone along the ages ; from another, its complacent disregard of the rottenness of its economic foundations and the unreality of its political superstructure surpasses anything in the nineteenth century. So with the Middle Ages: to the modern medievalist they are a time of sensible hard-work and embryonic blue-books; yet it is only a few years since they are invariably represented as all theory and bad drainage, with a plentiful sprinkling of the little flowers of St. Francis in the interests of spiritual hygiene. So, too, with the Renaissance; its date has been pushed so far back by

medievalists and so far forward by modernists that the whole overblown bubble threatens to burst into nothingness. That is the inevitable fate of all our labels : they begin, in the hands of the masters, as helpful signposts : they end by being chopped up for the academic fuel of historians whose craft is not life but a living, and they vanish accordingly in vapour of smoke.

Victorianism is passing through the same stages to a similar fate. The more earnestly we seek to capture its essence, the more completely does the whole business transform itself from a reasoned, objective attitude to life, into one or two specific but subjective grievances against one's own grandmothers. We are beginning to realise, after all, that Victorianism is not so much the attitude adopted by the Victorians towards their world, as the attitude adopted by posterity towards the Victorians. Posterity is quite as likely to go wrong now that it means ourselves, as it has done on previous occasions when it has meant our ancestors : and yet it is posterity which will decide what gets into the history-books about the Victorians. Moreover, posterity in the mass is as ready as individual human adolescents to reject its parents' morality, and to jump to the conclusion that that morality has always been what it was at the moment when adolescent self-consciousness first became insistent. We are ourselves the sons of the Victorians, come to manhood : we detest the narrow faith of our fathers, and we condemn it as though they were necessarily less inconsistent than we know ourselves to be. Another generation or so, and we shall be wiser and more tolerant : but by then our own posterity will be failing to realise that in our inmost hearts we cannot take ourselves as seriously as we would have them take us—and

they will slough off the hollow contrariness of our morality, as we have done that of the Victorians.

Victorianism, if you will, was a morality : and we shall fail to do it justice until we realise that, like all moralities, it was less a manner than a movement—less a static creed than a dynamic development : that certainly no two Victorian years and no two Victorian personalities were ever quite alike : that Melbourne in 1837 was as different from Salisbury in 1901 as Walpole in 1737 was from Pitt in 1801, or Charles I from William III a century earlier. Transition is written in flaming capitals all over the Victorian age ; it flares up from any typical phenomenon which may be chosen at random to illustrate it. The period may go down to history as the age of steam and slums ; but it produced its own antidote in electricity and town-planning. The rank ugliness of Victorian town-life was, in fact, nothing more than a skinny chrysalis helping and hindering its passage from the larva of the domestic system to the full development of modern industrialism.

For the Victorian Age was the age of steam only because it was the age of science ; and for the same reason steam was bound, sooner or later, to lose its predominance. Moreover, it was not only in industry that the science of the Victorians found its realisation. Religion, also, was affected ; and if the Victorians produced the slum as we know it, and all the fruits of an academic, unthinking industrialism, they produced also the newer medievalism of Newman, Ruskin and Burne-Jones—a medievalism which was neither more medieval nor more intellectual than industrialism itself, but which was at least a revolt against the unintellectual modernism of Victorian social conditions. Carlyle was in the same

camp—and with his doctrine of steady work at a practical task he came nearer to the real spirit of the middle ages than either he or his contemporaries understood.

Thus in religion, as well as in industry, Victorianism was a transition—an evangelical age which produced Anglo-Catholicism. We remember that Shaftesbury was an evangelical philanthropist, that Palmerston appointed only evangelical bishops, that Victoria fettered the Court and the nation with an evangelical hypocrisy ; we even remember with advantages that Disraeli was an evangelical Jew : and we forget that Gladstone, the most characteristic figure of them all, was an evangelical Catholic. It is a commonplace that every age fit to be called an age, is itself a reaction against its predecessor. Victorianism was a reaction against the eighteenth century, and if it reacted towards the morals of the seventeenth, it reacted at least as much towards those of the twelfth.

Victorianism, in fact, was a mass of incompatible contradictions, and it is therefore easy to construct a case against it by concentrating on its weakest points. From this tendency of historical generalisation to ignore inconvenient phenomena the Victorians have suffered as much as anybody. We spend on their inventions the wealth they bequeathed, and sit in the comfort they taught us to prize, concocting with the education they gave us a charge of sterility against them. They were anything but sterile—and we, of all people, ought to know it. But we are resolved to condemn the wisdom of our fathers, and we therefore disregard their merits and dwell complacently (for we have Victorian blood in our veins) upon their faults. Their greatest fault, we say, is their lack of originality ; and we play

upon that for all it is worth. The age which invented a new democracy, a new imperialism, two new political parties, a new theory and practice of economics, a bevy of new sciences, a new outlook on religion (which, however, pretended to be old), and a new art self-consciously artistic—this is the age which lacks originality !

Artists are noisy, and it is therefore the art of the Victorians which has received most criticism. Admittedly, there are some very vulnerable spots. The country is dotted with pseudo-Gothic enormities which insist on pointing their ugliness to heaven ; galleries are crowded with pictures painted in barley-sugar, and the bottom drawers of our music cabinets are littered with works by Brinley Richards, which ought to have been burnt ages ago. But we forget that few artistic productions can be masterpieces ; and we are still too close to the Victorian age to realise how much of it will be forgotten. A great work here and a great work there are usually enough to stamp an age as artistic ; and if Sir Gilbert Scott is to be condemned, he must be condemned either for not being original, or for not being medieval—whereas the modern tendency is to condemn him for both. In any case he can stand comfortably beside leading architects of the eighteenth century like the Dances ; if the provinces are strewn with Victorian enormities in Gothic, London is strewn with Renaissance enormities of the Augustans.

It is, in fact, only by ignoring the better parts of the Victorians that their age can be generally condemned. Particular condemnations are possible in every age, but the Victorians at least produced as much good as evil. Your æsthete may maintain that Victorianism was a complacently bourgeois indiffer-

ence to everything but utility narrowly conceived, but he is faced with the fact that æstheticism itself was a Victorian product, and that it had gone far enough in the early 'eighties to be ridiculed by the only Victorian dramatist who looks like making a lasting appeal to his own and succeeding generations. Morris and Ruskin were both Victorians, but they were neither of them indifferent to any sort of art ; and we do not sufficiently realise that even Victorianism produced, not only defences of people like Guinevere, but also the subtler sensuousness of Tennyson, for which no defence at all was considered necessary, in spite of the prevailing prurience of the period. If the retort is made that both Morris and Ruskin, and still more Tennyson, were about as self-satisfied as any Victorian could be, we have only to get back to Matthew Arnold, and, for that matter, Carlyle, both of whom spent themselves in an attack on complacency for which the Victorian public paid them so well that it cannot have been altogether complacent itself, after all. You may call the Victorians inartistic as energetically as you like, but at least they had revolutions of their own in painting and architecture, literature and music, and one of the biggest blots upon the writings of the Victorian age is the license which they permitted to their art critics in every field. It will not do to stamp, as either indifferent to art or lacking in artistic self-consciousness, an age which produced Pre-Raphaelitism and kept it within bounds ; which revived Gothic and, in spite of many enormities, gave it a meaning of its own ; which scattered broadcast upon the history of literature a greater number of lasting names than any previous period ; and which, beginning with the melodious molasses of Mendelssohn as its criterion of musical taste, kept

conscientiously abreast of Wagner and ended by treating him as old-fashioned. That sort of age cannot be regarded as narrow-minded ; yet narrowness is certainly the chief count in our half-formulated indictment against the Victorians.

Fortunately, there is no need, in a book upon politics, to worry about anything more than their political outlook. Their art and their science can be safely left to look after themselves; and they have already looked after themselves so effectively that, armed by their teaching, we ourselves condemn the generation which produced railways and wireless, *vers libre,* the Decadents, evolution and promenade concerts, for being preoccupied exclusively with politics. And the paradox is that they were. They changed the face of the world, and the fools thought that they had done it all in Parliament. It was the age of the Parliamentary illusion. At a time when evolution was changing religion and electricity was changing industry until life seemed altered in all its aspects, the nation convinced itself that its destiny was settled in Downing Street ; and prime ministers were as convinced as anybody.

It is this apotheosis of Parliament at a time when, in reality, Parliament was comparatively unimportant, which has made the Victorian Age look more ridiculous than it deserves. "We live in an age of great events and little men," said Disraeli. If he was right about the events, the age itself was a great one, however small the men it produced ; and in fact, Disraeli was thinking only of its politicians. The age of Tennyson, Browning, Carlyle, Arnold and Ruskin ; of Faraday, Maxwell and Kelvin ; of Darwin and Huxley ; of Newman, Spurgeon and Booth; this was no age of little men, whatever

may be thought of the age of Disraeli and Gladstone. Of all the arts and sciences, it is in its politics alone that the age appears most truly "Victorian"—if by "Victorianism" we mean a pettifogging narrowness of outlook—a losing of the end in the means. Its politicians were men with a method, rather than men with a policy. Whatever their hand found to do, they did it with their might—and in their eagerness to be conscientious they forgot, as often as not, what they were doing. They were so anxious to be thorough that they found no time to be reasonable ; and therefore little of their achievement was finished in the design they had originally contemplated.

It was a defect inherent in the character of the age, which was at least as transitional in politics as it was in anything else. There is a tendency to conceive the Victorian Age—if by that we mean the age of Gladstone and Disraeli—as something with a downright character of its own, whereas its politics, like the rest of its interests, were constantly changing. There was no such thing as the Victorian ideal in politics ; there was even no such thing as a political ideal of Gladstone or of Disraeli. Moreover, it is no easier to generalise if by the Victorian Age we mean the age, not of these two, but of Palmerston and Russell. Of these four dominant figures in Victorian politics, three at least were subject to a transition quite as fundamental as that of the period in which they lived. Palmerston began his career as a Tory and ended it as a Whig ; Gladstone began as a Tory and ended as a Liberal ; Disraeli achieved the miraculous by starting as a Radical and turning Tory in a democratic age—and in the process changed the faith of his adoption from aristocratic Toryism to Tory democracy. And if Russell remained a Whig to the end, he did so

only by transforming Whiggery from obscurantist adhesion to revolutionary principles a hundred and fifty years old, into a reforming faith that abandoned by implication the cardinal principles of Whiggery as Burke had known it.

It is, in fact, the chief political feature of the Victorian Age that everybody and everything in politics changed their principles. In conformity with this general law, the principal politicians all changed their parties ; the parties changed their articles of faith; and even the articles of faith changed their essential characteristics. Political economics abandoned Mercantilism and adopted Free Trade. Imperial politics abandoned the old imperialism of conquest hallowed by eighteenth-century practice, and adopted instead the newer imperialism of federation—with an interlude, spanning the middle Victorian period, when imperialism itself was at a discount and England was prepared to relinquish her empire altogether. Monarchy abandoned the *fainéant* complaisance which the Revolution had forced upon it, and acquired an influence and a power which might have cracked with envy the constricted soul of George III himself.

Above all, the political spirit of the age was transformed from oligarchy to democracy—and even oligarchy and democracy were caught in the prevalent whirl of transition. The Whiggery and the Toryism of the eighteenth century had been based upon government by the landed interest in the interests of the land. Free Trade ended all that ; Victorian nobility found itself more concerned with its obligations than with its rights, so that even the House of Lords was changed from a bulwark of oligarchical privilege into the mouthpiece of enlightened aristocracy.

But the proudest achievement of the Victorians was their democracy—and with their three reform acts there is no need to emphasise this aspect of the period. What is usually forgotten, however, is that while the age was becoming democratic, democracy itself was becoming oligarchical. It is not merely that more reform bills were proposed by Russell, son of a Duke of Bedford and most aristocratic of Whigs, than by the rest of contemporary politicians put together; nor that the cardinal reform of the period was carried, in fact, by the Conservatives ; nor even that the new democratic electorate has proved itself more conservative than its predecessors. Democracy became oligarchical in the further sense that it fell under the control of a limited number of people—that after all it substituted a despotism of party discipline for a despotism of aristocratic control ; and party whips can cut as keenly as the lashes of absolute monarchy.

Such a consummation of democratic progress was, however, simply invited by the manner in which it was pursued ; for, after all, the decisive step in that progress was a leap, taken by a Conservative minister in defiance of conservative principles ; and it was a leap in the dark. There we have the distinction between political transition in the Victorian Age and transition in the rest of the arts and sciences and creeds—that in politics the nation lacked a leader. In science, the direction of intellectual change was pointed and controlled by Darwin and Huxley—it was essentially the age of evolution. In religion, the direction of spiritual change was pointed and controlled by Newman—it was the age of nascent Anglo-Catholicism, which burst all the swaddling clothes wrapped round it by its Victorian mother. In politics, it was the age of

constitutional democracy, but both the constitution and the democracy were out of control from the start, and instead of conscious advance in a determined direction, there was only the piecemeal legislation—"quack nostrums," as Carlyle called them—of men with little purpose beyond their own advancement. In England, principles were frankly abandoned in the search for some new thing capable of catching votes; in Ireland, principles were rigidly enforced upon a national genius which found them intolerable; abroad, small nations were fought or forsaken, and big nations were simply funked, with a combination of truculence and treachery which made us the scorn of the Continent. It was a period when Europe regarded this country as perfidious Albion, and when this country regarded itself as the strong, silent man of the Continent, with a practical pride in muddling through to an end which was sure to come right. "Muddling through" even became a sort of national slogan, and poetry sanctified the trust that, somehow, good would be the final goal of ill.

Inevitably, therefore, Victorian Politics are a hot-pot of opportunism; and the chief interest they provide is the spectacle of skilful shifting from expedient to expedient. Their true character is best seen by following the fortunes, not of the politicians who dominate the age, but of the political movements which they originated; and then it soon becomes apparent that what biography may condone as tactical ability, history with its longer view can only stigmatise as strategic myopia. The generals in Victorian politics did pretty things with their troops, but every battle they won served merely to prolong the war, and at the end of the reign political peace was further away than ever.

II. Democracy in the Making

"They strike into the existing order of things in pursuance of their ideas. But what they achieve is not what they intended; it is terribly unlike it." (*Bradley*, Shakespearean Tragedy).

IN the eyes of the Victorians, their proudest product was English democracy. Very few of us who look back upon them would willingly endorse that opinion. We are grateful for the organised empire they have given us, for their application of science to practical affairs, for their literature perhaps, or their church—but whether or not we agree that they did in fact make England a democracy, whether or not we even want England to be democratic, at all events we do not rank their constitutional achievements as highly as they did themselves. But they were a constitutional people; their thoughts were always more upon the manner of doing a thing than upon the essence of what they wished to do. They valued precedent with the fervour of an age approaching stagnation; and as their empire, their science, their literature and their church were developing upon lines by no means precedented, they were more than half ashamed of them all. The one thing they hugged to themselves was their constitution. Their politicians thought in terms of Parliament, and, what is more, believed in it; their philosophers reasoned about Parliament; and those of their History professors who were keeping an eye on the Government, with a view to political, ecclesiastical or academic promotion, wrote books about Parliament, instead of about the Empire, as they do nowadays. The Victorians felt for

Parliament nothing less than profound reverence, and that reverence persisted throughout the fundamental changes to which Parliament was subjected. It was an era of reform, and especially of Parliamentary reform; and after each fresh development the Victorians sat down to contemplate their work, and saw that it was good, oblivious of the fact that the reforms they actually adopted were not in the least what they wanted, that they had permitted Parliamentary procedure to mangle in its machinery the product they desired to obtain, and even that they had in fact condemned in anticipation every single one of the measures they now regarded so complacently.

It was, indeed, the paradox of the age that the Victorian mentality was compelled by the limitations of its own self-satisfaction to regard as static and final things which were really evolving, and therefore tentative. Change marked the whole period—in science and the arts no less than in the narrower field of politics. Whatever the Victorians touched they altered, while regarding it all the time as unalterable. They believed that God in his mercy had granted to them the ultimate truths of his revelation, and while in the strength of this belief they proclaimed their fixed and unchangeable faith in Jehovah of the Protestants, they allowed Darwin to commit them to the theory of evolution, and Newman to commit them to the practice of Catholicism. They shouted from the housetops of Europe the eternal truth of liberty and *laissez-faire* on the English pattern, while at the same time they crushed the working-classes with the devilry of their logic and tightened the bands of imperialism in all quarters of the globe. It was this spirit that led them to regard Parliament and the Constitution as

unalterably perfect, at the same time as they were introducing innovations wholly irreconcilable with the political ideals they professed; while, in their zeal to improve the unimprovable, they patched their imagined perfection with piecemeal devices which were in themselves the negation of any attempt at a reasoned system. They were so enamoured of their Parliamentary machinery that, even while they were trying to reform it, they permitted it to crush their measures into shapes which they thoroughly disliked. In fact, the reforms of the Victorians consisted essentially of the realisation, by their own deliberate efforts, of ideals which they themselves condemned.

That is not an exaggeration. The Victorians were fundamentally *bourgeois;* their political reforms were fundamentally proletarian. The history of Parliamentary reform in the nineteenth century is in truth the history of the adoption of Chartist principles; and yet the Victorians not merely detested Chartism—they ridiculed it, and watched it die amid paroxysms of national laughter. Towards the beginning of the reign, they dismissed with contempt the absurd petition of the Chartists, with its six unthinkable demands and its thousands of faked signatures, and thanked God that, while Europe was seething with revolution, He saved His England from anything more formidable than this. At the end of the reign, four of those six absurd demands had been embodied in the law of the land; a fifth followed within a decade of the queen's death; and nothing but practical inconvenience prevents the sixth from becoming more than a desirable but difficult ideal. That was typical of the Victorians—to condemn a scheme of reform, and to condemn it, not as Utopian, but as an unnecessary affront to the

Utopia which already existed; and then, having condemned it, to adopt it piece by piece, without recognising either the foresight of those who originally suggested it, or their own inconsistency in attempting to improve what was, on their own hypothesis, as near perfection as need be.

This paradox lying at the heart of Victorian politics is startling enough to demand fuller examination. The prime difficulty is that the paradox itself is too easy to understand without an effort—the effort of abandoning a customary point of view. Its truth can be shown without descending to minute details of personal and political conduct, and for that very reason it has been neglected. It is the old impossibility of seeing the wood for the trees. The histories and biographies on which we are still compelled to rely for information about the later nineteenth century are in more than one sense the work of contemporaries, and contemporaries are notoriously bemused by the fog of passing events. The biographies are " standard biographies," written by personal friends or official sycophants: the histories are " histories of our own times," and their sight is distorted by closeness of vision. Even those works which have appeared during the present century suffer from the prevailing complaint. They depend very considerably upon these same partial biographers and contemporary historians, and they repeat their generalisations. That is the crucial difficulty. When Victorian writers assert that the Victorians disliked Chartism, but liked Parliamentary reform based upon the ideals of universal suffrage, equal electoral districts, secret voting, and so on, their statement is accepted entire, despite its inherent inconsistency. As we have seen, this particular self-contradiction has been transferred unaltered from the

histories written by the Victorians to the histories written about them; and even those writers who find room—usually in a footnote—to remark that Chartism became an accomplished fact before the end of the century, still persist in repeating the ancient heresy that the Victorians approved of the reforms which constituted the Chartist programme. Their argument is something like this: The Victorians, when they were confronted by the formulated programme of the Chartists, under the leadership of the unbalanced O'Connor, deliberately condemned it: but during the course of the reign, they did, in fact, adopt most of the Chartist principles: therefore they must have been mistaken in their original condemnation — the reforms which they actually carried were a virtual recantation of their original profession of political faith.

There is an obvious superficial appeal about an argument presented in those terms. Unfortunately, it fails to square with the facts as we know them. It is necessary to guard against the common mistake of accepting the facts and the theories of Victorian writers as being of equal validity. If a contemporary says that a reform act was passed in 1867, and tells you its terms, there is no immediate necessity for doubting his word. But if he goes on to explain the motives behind the measure, he is leaving ground on which he has every means of obtaining accurate information, for the more hazardous realms of conjecture. If he is a mere observer, he is as likely as not to be deceived by appearances which only time can set in their right proportion: and if he is a politician at the heart of affairs, he has all the usual motives of the politician for painting his own conduct in the rosiest possible colours. The matter is still further complicated

when there is a sort of national and inter-party complacency which makes a point of approving the accomplished fact, and preening itself on its accomplishment. That is what has happened to falsify our view of the reforms of the Victorians. It seems to have escaped the notice of those who have written the history of those times, that the conversion to Chartist principles took place after, and not before, those principles had become the law of the land; and that the reason why they were passed by Parliament was not that the national representatives were giving legal form to the aspirations of a fundamentally democratic people, but that from time to time the momentary exigencies of party politics made it expedient for now this and now that party leader to pass a reform of some sort, and he usually chose something Chartist, because nothing else had been suggested.

In short, England was jockeyed into democracy by the tactics of politicians who were merely playing a party game, and all the commonplace vaunts of the splendour of England's growth in democratic stature, and the munificence of the constitutional gift which the Victorians handed on to posterity, are so much hypocritical cant born of the fulsome self-satisfaction of that very complacent people. We were brought up by the Victorians to believe that their pursuit of a noble ideal had yielded us the gift of a stable democracy. The truth is anything but that. Whether or not our democracy, or any other, can remain stable for any length of time, is perhaps a matter of opinion. But there ought to be no two opinions about the nature of the reforming movement which persisted throughout most of the Victorian age. That movement was not a consistent pursuit of democracy by a generation

devoted to the worship of freedom. It was little more than a disconnected series of political shifts, and it descended at times to the lowest levels of unprincipled opportunism. Moreover, it had not even the virtue of achieving any predetermined purpose. The democracy which the Victorians foisted upon the country was not the democracy which either they or anybody else desired; and in spite of the unanimous verdict of its perpetrators, endorsed as usual by the parrot historians of the Victorian period, it is at least arguable that the resultant loss to the nation has far outweighed the estimated gain.

. . . . . .

The basis of the whole casual superstructure was, of course, the Reform Act of 1832. Fortunately, that act falls outside our chronological limits, and the terrific details of its provisions, which only a lawyer could understand and not even a lawyer could remember, do not immediately concern us. But it fixed the political position for the first three decades of the Queen's reign, and it is therefore important to grasp not only its general effects, but also the attitude which the early Victorians adopted towards it. Both of these factors are clear enough. It is admitted that the primary significance of the great Reform Act was that it enfranchised the middle classes. Roughly speaking, before 1832 every county vote had been under the control of some landowner, and in the boroughs the control had been more oligarchical still. Elections were decided by public voting, and the public vote of the forty shilling freeholder was at the mercy of the freeholder's landlord—the "freehold" being, as often as not, a legal disguise for the multiplication of votes in a local interest.

This system, with its irresistible incentives to the grossest forms of bribery and intimidation (at the election of 1831, even the evangelical Ashley, later the seventh Earl of Shaftesbury, spent £12,000 on beer), survived for forty years after the reform of 1832; but during that period the intimidation of the old landlords of the country was partially, at least, counterbalanced by the intimidation of the new non-aristocratic landlords of the manufacturing classes—men who followed Cobden's lead in buying land and splitting it up into forty-shilling freeholds with votes attached. This first reform enfranchised about half-a-million new electors, and so doubled the electorate. Many of the new votes were controlled, as much as the old ones, by the county families: but the manufacturers had at least managed to get a finger into the political pie, and before long they pulled out and consumed the free trade plum. So that some influence at any rate passed to the middle classes (which then comprised a far smaller proportion of the population than they do nowadays, when everybody goes to school), and, in the period between the first two reform bills, statesmen of a new, merchant type (such as Cobden, Bright, and, in spite of his immediate antecedents, Sir Robert Peel) rubbed shoulders with hall-marked Whigs like Palmerston and Lord John Russell. With due allowance for all necessary reserves, it remains true that the work of the first reform law was to give political power to the middle classes, who, during the first half of the Queen's reign, shared it with the aristocrats.

That was the position from which the reforming movements of the Victorians were compelled to start, and the essential thing to remember is that after a few years everybody was contented with that

position as perfectly satisfactory. Wellington and his fellow Tories, who had fought the Reform Bill tooth and nail, until they were confronted with the alternatives of either accepting it or destroying the power of the House of Lords, were soon reconciled to it as a necessary evil, which was irremediable only because any change must be for the worse. Peel, the most important Tory in the House of Commons, went out of his way to issue the "Tamworth Manifesto," in which he describes the reform as a "final and irrevocable settlement of a great constitutional question — a settlement which no friend to the peace and welfare of this country would attempt to disturb." Tories like Gladstone and Disraeli were compelled to follow his lead; and Gladstone, during his lengthy metamorphosis from Tory, through the pupal stage of Peelite, to his imaginal perfection as a Liberal, saw no reason to change his opinion, or to advance further to the left than lifelong Whigs like Lord John Russell. Russell himself, the author and introducer of the Reform Bill, was so convinced of the impossibility of improving upon it that he earned the name of "Finality Jack." Melbourne, of course, wanted to let it alone; and Palmerston, the only remaining first-rank statesman in this period, was notoriously as conservative at home as he was liberal abroad. It is true that a few isolated Radicals, like Bright, were anxious for a further change; but their power was almost negligible, and even they regarded the six points of Chartism as the demands of fanatical extremists. The Chartists themselves were shown, by the universal ridicule with which they met, to be in a hopeless minority: and that ridicule, which was the spontaneous expression of national feeling, sufficiently indicated the attitude of the unenfran-

chised masses. These latter were, in any case, in no mood to trust their very real economic grievances to the chances of purely political reform. Mob violence had counted heavily towards getting the first Reform Act passed, and that act had failed to result in cheaper food, shorter hours, or better wages. The working classes had lost their faith in politics, and the days of Trade Unionism were not yet. There were millions of aggrieved workers in 1848: yet Feargus O'Connor, aiming at only one million signatures to the People's Charter, failed to obtain more than a fifth of that number; and of those a large proportion were obviously faked. Clearly there was no desperate demand for Parliamentary reform from the working classes.

Why, then, was the question re-opened—and, above all, why was it re-opened by "Finality Jack," who began introducing fresh reform bills in 1852, and kept it up for fifteen years without getting a single one of them passed? The answer lies in the essential nature of Liberalism, which always begins by attacking acknowledged abuses, and which, once its reforms are successfully carried, weeps because there are no more worlds to conquer—and then tries to conquer them after all. Liberalism subsists upon innovation, and so it can never afford to let well alone. It is rather a force than a creed, and its momentum is constantly driving men of Liberal inclinations to the adoption of new and yet more revolutionary principles. The only alternative is to desert Liberalism altogether, and to find the customary refuge of advancing years in the congenial quiescence of Conservatism. But those who remain Liberals are propelled continuously into fresh novelties, and in those cases where all necessary reforms have been accomplished, needless reforms

have to be adopted. More often than not, in these circumstances, the national sense realises that the need for Liberalism is for the moment past, and the political pendulum swings in the Conservative direction.

The phenomenon is a perfectly familiar one in all stages of the history of every country, and it recurred with prominence on at least two occasions in Victorian times. One was when Gladstone found himself slipping down the slide of his Irish policy towards a Home Rule which he had no desire to adopt. The other was Lord John Russell's inability to avoid reviving Parliamentary reform in an advanced shape. Russell himself was by temperament a Liberal, and it had taken him considerably less than twenty years to regret his title of "Finality Jack," and to conceive instead a decided preference for his other title of "Lord John Reformer." Reform was, indeed, the keynote of the whole of his political career, and it is a pity that he was not permitted to realise the wish of repeating in his seventies the political performance which had brought him distinction before he was forty. The failure was at any rate not due to want of trying. It was inevitable that his Liberal sympathies should be stirred even by such a fiasco as that of the Chartists, and within four years of their collapse he introduced a new reform bill which embodied a considerable part of the Chartist programme.

It would be tedious and unprofitable to recapitulate the varying details of the four reform bills which Russell introduced within the next fifteen years, since not one of them became law. They are important, however, since they, with the equally abortive measure proposed by the Conservative

ministry in 1859, represent with fair accuracy the extreme limit of reform which any party was prepared to consider between the fall of the Chartists and the Second Reform Act. Their significance lies, moreover, rather in what they dared not propose than in the proposals which were actually made. They dealt, like all three of the great reforms of the century, both with the franchise and with the redistribution of seats. With regard to the former, the most extreme suggestions ever advanced were that the county qualification should be reduced to £10*, and the borough qualification to £5†. Even these were considered so dangerous that all parties agreed on the necessity for artificial safeguards against the influence of an intellectually unbalanced electorate. Disraeli was a specialist in these "fancy franchises" invented to counteract the irresponsibility of the lowest classes of voters, whose commonsense was not guaranteed by their interest in lands and tenements. Lawyers, doctors and Nonconformist ministers were regarded as safe by reason of either their studies or their position—it was not clear which: teachers might be allowed to vote if they could give proof of a specified minimum of brains. People who were sober enough to save say £30, £50 or £60 and keep it in the bank were presumably sober enough for some share in political power; while those who were drawing pensions or interest from the government might be trusted to support the existing order for the sake of their incomes. All these qualifications were suggested from time to time by both parties, and both revealed thereby their determination to control the influence of the poorest class of electors—what we should now call the lower middle classes. Even

* By Russell's bill of 1860 † By Russell's bill of 1852

these were suspected of political instability, and nobody dreamed of proposing that any of the really poor should receive a vote. Not a single statesman even ventured to suggest an undiluted household suffrage, until Disraeli introduced his cataclysmic bill in 1867.

Even without household suffrage, this measure would have been drastic enough to deserve without qualification the epithet " revolutionary," if " revolution " is a break in essential tradition. It was harmless enough to reduce the property qualification for the county franchise from £10 to £5, especially since the fall in prices since 1840 made the change much less effective than mere figures would appear to indicate. But the act of 1832, passed by a government of reforming Whigs, had taken care that the electorate should not assume too radical a complexion, by fixing the "occupation" franchise at £50. If votes were to be given to men whose stability was not guaranteed by the possession of land, at any rate they were to be men whose rentals were of sufficient magnitude to make them cautious of political upheavals. The new act, passed over the heads of conservative Whigs by Tories even more conservative in sympathy, embodied no such precautions. The £50 rental was reduced to a rateable value of £12, and there was thus admitted to the franchise an agricultural class in whom no confidence was felt by either of the political parties. From the beginnings of the English constitution, the English Parliament had been rooted in the soil, chosen only by landowners and merchants of high local standing. The act of 1832 had made a hardly perceptible break with the letter of this tradition, and no break at all with its spirit. But in 1867 the

whole principle was thrown overboard at the whim of a minister of alien race, and for the future, not even the agricultural vote could be confidently controlled by the only agricultural class which might be relied upon to vote intelligently.

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All this was revolutionary enough. For good or for evil, English Parliamentary evolution had broken with feudalism—and whether it was indeed for evil or for good, posterity has not yet troubled to decide. Posterity has been far too interested in another question. The parliamentary revolution which Disraeli wrought in the counties was, in fact, conservatism itself when compared with his achievement in the boroughs, and succeeding generations have rightly concentrated upon that as the essence of the second Reform Act. In the counties, perhaps, the Conservatives were lashed by their leader with whips: in the boroughs, he lashed them with scorpions. In the counties it was just possible to pretend that Disraeli's legislation differed only in degree from previous proposals of the Conservative party: in the towns there was a frank, an even brazen, abandonment of the most fundamental Conservative principles. It is, therefore, reasonable to fix the remainder of our attention upon this, the essential achievement of the act of 1867.

Any general description of that achievement has to depend upon personal preferences. It was either the realisation of British democracy, or national subjection to proletarian caprice, according to the point of view. But whichever view is correct—and perhaps there is enough commonsense in all social classes to invalidate both—it cannot apply to Disraeli's work alone. The Liberals must stand or fall

with the Conservatives, and whether posterity decides to approve or to condemn the political work of the Victorians, it will have to approve or condemn them in bulk, without differentiation between the parties. For whatever it was that Disraeli was doing, he was only doing it by halves. It is possible that the effect of his bill was to secure for Britons the highest privileges of the Athenians; it is possible that it has merely condemned us to their fatal vagaries. In either case, Disraeli had not the courage to be consistent. Perhaps the poorest classes of the English people were already capable of directing their own destinies, but if so, it was, on Disraeli's showing, only those who had been reared among the civilising amenities of Victorian industrialism. It was reserved for the Liberals, who were the traditional guardians of the interests of the townsfolk, to uphold against the landlords' own party the thesis that English agriculture was at least as enlightened as English trade, and as capable of exercising the functions of democracy. Seventeen years after Disraeli's reform, Gladstone—who probably believed that the only enlightened people in the land were himself and the young men he was interested in at the moment—completed Disraeli's work, by extending to the counties the conditions of franchise already established in the towns by the Conservatives.

The bill of 1884 was merely the logical outcome of the bill of 1867, and the essential characteristics of any democracy for which it may claim credit, was determined by Disraeli's earlier proposals. It expressed not so much the personal convictions of Gladstone, as the necessity for finishing what Disraeli had begun; and indeed this ostensibly Liberal measure was far more truly the work of

Disraeli than of the Liberal Prime Minister, who in this, as in so large a proportion of the crises of his political life, was merely treading with cultured and conventional hauteur in the footsteps of other people. Gladstone was the sublime ideal of the Victorian average. He had passed with brilliance through the ordinary channels of the ordinary academic education of his time. He had beaten all ordinary undergraduates in the race for the customary prizes obtainable in the normal curriculum of the university. He had gone from the university into politics in the usual way, with the usual sort of promise. He had written the usual books, held the usual offices, and remained true to his fallen leader with the usual loyalty of the ordinarily honourable man. His supreme capacity for the conscientious conduct of stereotyped routine achieved for him a reputation for financial ability—which consists, after all, mainly in a happy knack of striking the golden mean more frequently than other people. Economics is a science of averages, and averages were the sort of data with which Gladstone's genius was pre-eminently fitted to deal. As Chancellor of the Exchequer he was certainly a success. But there is no reason to believe that during the whole of his exceedingly lengthy career in politics, which he began as "the rising hope of the stern, unbending Tories," and ended as the Grand Old Man of the Liberals, he ever conceived an original political idea, or adopted a policy which had not been suggested by somebody else.

It was only natural, therefore, that his reform should be no more than an imitation, logical and predetermined, of the reform already achieved by his more versatile rival; and in considering the Liberal measure it is more important to appreciate

the personality of Disraeli than that of Gladstone. It is, in fact, one of the most startling paradoxes of that most paradoxical period, that the personal factor which it is always safe to ignore is that of the man who was Prime Minister for more years than any other statesman. Gladstone always did what was expected—usually long after people had expected him to do it.

Disraeli, on the other hand, specialised in surprises. It is impossible, in a brief commentary like this, to do the faintest shadow of justice to the most intriguing personality of the century. It is enough to say that every moment of his adult life was controlled by the one motive of ambition, and that the methods by which he set about realising his dreams were as fantastic as they could be. No one can read the letters of his early days without being staggered by the colossal presumption of this conceited young man. He adopted the manners of an impudent coxcomb, and he reaped the inevitable consequences of unpopularity and ridicule. But to him, unpopularity and ridicule were merely an admirable means of attracting attention. All he coveted was to focus public interest upon himself, and he succeeded so well that the public has not yet withdrawn its gaze. In consequence, the methods by which he chose to court renown are so familiar, that it is difficult to support any general statement about him, without recourse to hackneyed illustrations. The youthful foppishness with which he made himself prominent among a younger generation of fops is one of the half-dozen jokes of the text-books. Even his admirers confess that the combination of "green velvet trousers, a canary-coloured waistcoat, low shoes, silver buckles, lace at his wrists, and his hair in ringlets" was adopted not as the expression of

his admittedly eccentric personality, but deliberately, in order to get himself observed. With Disraeli, notoriety was always preferable to obscurity, but he was not the man to value notoriety for its own sake. Everything at all times subserved his ambition, and this initial basing of his reputation upon an assumed dandyism was simply the first step towards building up a reputation of a more solid kind.

Moreover, he had no shame in attempting to convince the hard and unreceptive heads of the House of Commons by the same arts as he used in wooing the more susceptible hearts of drawing-room matrons. He carried his velvet trousers, waistcoat, lace, buckles, and ringlets into Parliament, and became, to his own complete satisfaction, the butt of the place. When he rose to make his maiden speech he was received with open derision, and howled down before the honourable members had realised that he was talking distinctly more sense than they usually had the opportunity of hearing. As he sat down, after a vain attempt to make himself audible, he threw out the challenge that he would compel the House to hear him—some time. He did it within a week, and at once took rank with Demosthenes in the homilies on perseverance delivered by Victorian fathers; and the House of Commons never again treated his speeches with anything but respect.

Thus by assuming an outward pose of vapid eccentricity he had taken the first step in compelling a recognition of his sound sense and brilliant gifts. Nevertheless, his powers were always used with consistent selfishness. Like most of his contemporaries, he had chosen politics because it offered a profession with reasonable chances of

success. But whereas most of his contemporaries began at that point to pay less attention to self-interest, and more to the obligations of their position, Disraeli carried his frank self-seeking several stages further. He was a Tory, not because his alien mind was Tory in sympathy, but because there were already too many promising young men in the ranks of the Whigs, and the Tory party contained fewer possible rivals. He had made his choice, quite openly, in favour of promotion as against principle, except that everything he did was dictated by his one principle of ambition.

Once in his seat, he continued to aim at becoming conspicuous, and he mapped out a reasoned programme of eccentricity. It is usual for young men in Parliament to bide their time, and wait in patience upon their leaders, until they are promoted from the general scramble for crumbs to a recognised place at the official table. Disraeli did no such thing. He was a Tory, and he therefore did precisely what nobody expected a Tory to do. He made Tory policy the regular object of his attack. He was young, and dependent on the goodwill of Peel; he therefore concentrated upon Peel the keenest of the many taunts which he fired from his rhetorical battery. This persistent yapping at the heels of the harassed Prime Minister (who had as much as he could do to defend himself against adversaries in front of him), gained for Disraeli the useful distinction of resentment. Peel, though grudgingly and under constant provocation, admitted his prowess, and his career was advanced by a further step. Consequently, when, after the Repeal of the Corn Laws, Peel withdrew from office, and took with him the most brilliant of the younger Tories, Disraeli was left without a contemporary rival, and before long

he was the recognised leader of the orthodox Tory Rump.

The price of his success was yet another addition to his growing reputation for shady conduct, but that was a price Disraeli was perfectly willing to pay. The actual manœuvre by which Peel had been displaced was consistent with the scheme as a whole. Both Disraeli and the Whigs really believed in the necessity for a Coercion Bill for Ireland, yet they combined to veto the measure which Peel proposed. In this, of course, the Whigs have to share the disgrace with Disraeli, but the former were at least prepared to offer an alternative government with a policy of its own, whereas Disraeli was condemning to inactivity the one government which could carry into operation the only policy which he could consistently approve—and condemning it, too, for introducing a bill which embodied the principles most characteristic of its party and his. It was another deliberate sacrifice of his political creed to the cravings of his ambition, and it deprived England of the leadership of her greatest living statesman at a crisis when she most urgently needed his guidance. Peel was never again in office, and the reason was that one of his rising followers, who at the time was his inferior, had undermined his position by the treachery of a blinded egoism.

Such were the means by which Disraeli forced himself into acceptance by the country. The whole business was a worthy prelude to the colossal betrayal of 1867. Disraeli was Party Leader only because he had attributed to base motives those reversals of policy which were due, in fact, to Peel's fundamental honesty; yet it was he who now accomplished the most wanton political treason of the century.

In recent years there has been a growing tendency to describe the Reform Act of 1867 as the realisation of Disraeli's life-long principles. There is a good deal to be said in favour of this contention; there is always a good deal to be said on both sides of most historical questions. In this particular period the vacillations of all parties were so considerable that almost every statesman can be quoted in support of almost any view of every question that arose; and Disraeli was the most versatile and irresponsible of them all. It is quite true, for example, that as early as 1844 Disraeli maintains, in *Coningsby,* that universal suffrage must inevitably follow the Reform of 1832. But it is also true that twenty-two years later he said exactly the opposite. At a time like this it is dangerous to infer consistency of views from the statements of any politician, since they mostly spoke for the requirements of the moment, and they hardly intended that their words should be taken seriously for very long. That is the standing shame of the whole political world at the time of the Victorian Reform. It was a revolutionary upheaval; it loosened the floods beyond all future chance of damming; it committed the nation to a political course from which there could be no opportunity of turning back. Whether the Reform was good or whether it was evil, it was at any rate deadly serious and vitally important. In 1867 England was bound to the wheel of democracy—the most fundamental change she has experienced in modern times; more fundamental than the cautious reform of 1832, more fundamental than any of the subsequent reforms, which, indeed, are based upon it. Yet a candid review of the actions and utterances of the politicians who controlled this vital change can only yield the con-

viction that they were swayed, almost without exception, by a trifling irresponsibility which would appear black enough in any of those recurring periods when cynicism is allowed an open prevalence, but which, in these smug proclaimers of all that is conscientious, can only rank with the direst of political blasphemies. It is instructive to examine in detail the attitude of these earnest Victorians on a matter of such profound consequence.

In the first place, they had no business to be bothering about Parliamentary reform at all, since, as the Earl of Shaftesbury said, nobody wanted it. Parliament and the franchise were neither of them perfect in the 'sixties, but they were as near perfection as most things, and ours is not the generation to affirm that there has been any improvement. The parliamentary position in those years was based upon the reform of 1832: that reform was the work of the Whigs, and the Whigs were satisfied. They had said so, over and over again. Russell himself had become "Finality Jack," simply because he had given reign to his complacent contemplation of the measure he had pushed through the corrupt Parliament of the Hanoverians. Yet it was the Whigs who were now suggesting further reform, and their mouthpiece was this same Russell, grown grey in the service of Whiggery, and realising at length that Whiggery itself would only die of inanition if it persisted in the belief that it had already accomplished the parliamentary millennium, and that unless they abandoned their Whig finality for a progressive Liberalism, he and his followers would be flung into unemployment, the unwanted pensioners of an age which had left them behind.

Possibly Russell was the most honest of the

greater statesmen of the reign; certainly he was among the least dishonest. Yet Russell's main object in proposing fresh reforms was not so much the welfare of the people as the re-habilitation of his own party. There was nothing national in any of the Reform Acts, and it is one of the peculiar ironies of the most important of them all, that it was mooted by the Liberals for the benefit of the Liberal party, and that it was carried by the Conservatives for the benefit of the Conservative party. It would be possible, of course, to base upon this singular unanimity any sort of sweeping generalisation that the act of 1867 was a truly national measure, expressive of those fundamental bases of democracy upon which both parties were agreed. That is the interpretation the Victorians themselves adopted, once they had seen it accomplished, and had forgotten their own contemporary opinions. Unluckily for them, their contemporary opinions have survived them, since they were only too anxious at the time to ensure their publicity.

It is quite true that reform was the programme of the Liberal party, and that the Conservative act of 1867 was largely a paraphrase of previous Liberal proposals; it is equally true that the Liberals voted against it. It is true that the credit of carrying the measure belongs to the Conservatives: it is equally true that in carrying it they abandoned Conservative principles, and that they would never have been in power at all, or in a position to propose the bill, except for the co-operation of that section of their opponents which had seceded from the main Liberal body only because they declined to tolerate any reform at all. In 1866, Russell proposed a moderate reform, and he was consequently expelled from

office by the Adullamites, to whom reform was anathema: the Adullamites set up a Conservative prime minister, for reform was anathema also to the Conservatives; and in 1867 the Conservatives passed a reform more cataclysmic than any which the Liberals had ever suggested.

There can be no doubt, therefore, that the Adullamites were the best judges of the worth of Victorian democracy. One of them described the position succinctly enough at the time: "What was a conflict last year, is a race now," said Lowe in 1867, and the ignominy of this party scramble for the favour of the proletariat was recognised by the competitors. "I desire to protest, in the most earnest language I am capable of using, against the political morality on which the manœuvres of this year have been based;" that was the considered opinion, at the end of the struggle, of one of the most prominent members of that Conservative party which carried the bill—and he afterwards became a Conservative prime minister. "A strange and eventful year—a deplorable one, I think, for the character and conduct of the House of Commons"—such was the judgment of the man who led the opposition in the House of Commons throughout the conflict—and he became Liberal prime minister in the following year. Everybody, in fact, betrayed both themselves and their principles. Reason, prudence, taste, and even truth were thrown overboard in the frenzied efforts to keep two party boats afloat—and the consequences to the ship of state were totally ignored. For this reason, the statesmanship of a later day has been far too often concerned with the improvisation of palliatives for the unforeseen results of Victorian reform. Whatever the present level of political morality, modern states-

men have no reason to thank the vaunted conscience of their Victorian predecessors.

That is the spectacle confronting candid historians of constitutional reform in the last century. Neither party knew what it wanted, except that it wanted above all things the discomfiture of the other. There lies the explanation why the Whigs, who had introduced reform only for the purposes of party tactics, were found in 1867 voting against the specific remedies which they themselves had recommended in the previous year; why Russell hinted at universal suffrage but never dared to suggest it; why Gladstone proposed a savings-bank qualification in one session and ridiculed it as a "fancy franchise" in the next: why Bright, who had occupied for years the post of leader of the left, suddenly found himself out-distanced in democracy by the die-hards of the right. That was also the reason why the blind-folded Tories took their desperate leap into the dark under the guidance of the capricious alien who stood as the acknowledged defender of British precedent. In 1867, as eleven years later, "the Jew was the man," and it was in their desperate attempt to follow the will-o'-the-wisp of his exotic imagination that the Conservatives managed to sink their party into a political morass. They were, in fact, cheated into democracy in pursuance of a party aim; and the consummate roguery with which Disraeli lured his men along the unaccustomed and unwelcome route of reform deserves a closer inspection.

Mention has already been made of the tendency of modern historians to justify Disraeli's reform as the realisation of opinions which he expressed, as early as 1844, in *Coningsby*. It is, therefore, worth while to notice another passage in the same novel:—

> "I have no faith in the remedial qualities of a government carried on by a neglected democracy, who for three centuries have received no education."

And that utterance, which might reasonably be disregarded as one of the many irresponsibilities of the merely ostentatious period of his youth, is supported by the later testimony of his maturity. The words of the novice, still undecided whether to be an author or a politician, are echoed by the Conservative leader of twenty years later:—

> "I hope the House, when the question is one of impeaching the character of our constitution, will hesitate: that it will sanction no step that has a tendency to democracy";

and a few months later he could foretell no better consequence of the reform which he himself copied in the following year, than the political dominance of "a horde of selfish and obscure mediocrities, incapable of anything but mischief, and that mischief devised and regulated by the raging demagogue of the hour." In 1867 Disraeli himself became the first of these raging demagogues of the hour, and when the hour had passed, his whole party experienced that evanescence of popularity which, in spite of his own previous warning, he had caused them to disregard.

Thus there is no lack of evidence for the inconsistency of Disraeli's reform with his own previous declaration of policy. The Liberal case against him was complete as soon as the reform itself: and there would be no need, so long after the event, to recapitulate the arguments, if it were not for the paltry apologetics of some modern Conservative historians. Anybody at the time could have anticipated these writers in their array of declarations

by Disraeli which appear to foreshadow the step he took in 1867: but the only people interested in so doing were not slow to realise that all they could thereby accomplish would be to damn Disraeli's speeches and writings, along with his statesmanship. Once again, it is possible to prove vacillation against Victorian statesmanship; it is eternally impossible, even by the longest list of congruent quotations, to prove its consistency, since it is as easy to produce equally long lists of quotations that are by no means congruent.

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There is, however, a much better indication of Disraeli's motives, in the cabinet history of 1867. In the first place, his was a minority government, dependent for its very existence on the support of a Whig coterie whose chief bond of union was their detestation of parliamentary reform. In the teeth of this situation Disraeli determined, as Derby had determined with him eight years previously, that their prime necessity was to " dish the Whigs," and that the Whigs would best be dished by catching them bathing and running away with their clothes—to employ the expressive simile with which Disraeli had once condemned the much more honourable tergiversation of his leader Peel. For the moment—and it was only for the moment—the Liberals were split, and the Adullamite section, as the issue showed, were in the mood for cutting off their own nose to spite their face. Disraeli was not the man to lose his chance, and the Adullamites found themselves tied to the cart tail of a reforming Conservative minister, who was opposed to every one of their principles, and most of all to that principle of conservatism which had led them to support him.

Naturally enough, Disraeli had more difficulty with his own supporters, who were conservative in name as well as in principle. With them he was merely deceitful. The only difference between Liberals and Conservatives on the question of reform was that the latter were, by temperament, more emphatically against it than their opponents. Disraeli, however, managed to convince them that they were bound by the exigencies of the political position to bid no lower than the Liberals in the competition for power. Beyond this they would not budge, and it was therefore their received policy on the vital issue of household suffrage, that the Tory interpretation of that conveniently elastic phrase was the same as that of the Liberals. Neither side wanted to grant votes to any more people than they could possibly help, and both were for a time content to exclude from the franchise those classes which were too poor to pay their rates except as a compounded part of their rents. When the Liberals were persuaded to go one higher in their bidding, and permit their "household suffrage" to bear its literal meaning of an unrestricted franchise, Disraeli's followers refused to move any further, and Disraeli himself was threatened with the undesirable probability of having to stand aside and allow his Liberal measure to be carried by a Liberal government. But the only obstacle, after all, was that the more narrow-minded of the Conservatives insisted on remaining more Conservative than the Liberals, and their leader therefore resolved to act without them. On his own responsibility, and without consulting either his party or his cabinet, Disraeli altered his draft of the bill so as to include the most liberal of the Liberal proposals. Both sides had now

offered the highest possible terms; bidding was at an end, and as the Conservatives happened to be in office, the credit of the reform was theirs.

That was probably the most dishonourable act of Disraeli's political career. The Conservatives had stolen the Liberal programme, and their leader had neglected to observe even the honour customary among thieves: but it was necessary for the gang to work together—and they worked together after their kind. After all, they were Conservatives, and they preferred that their measure should make as little difference as possible. They therefore agreed in Cabinet upon a bill which would have added under half a million voters to the register. This bill they introduced into Parliament : and Parliament, which contained more Liberals than Conservatives, gave it the cold shoulder. The Conservative generals therefore withdrew behind their entrenchments, and then delivered an attack along a wide front. Within two days of the Cabinet decision in favour of this first proposal—and the Cabinet's approval was based quite frankly upon party and not upon national considerations—within twenty-four hours of its introduction in the House of Commons, the whole measure was replaced by the essentially Radical enactment which ultimately became law, and which increased the electorate by over a million. In the face of that kind of evidence, it is not easy to tolerate the endeavours of modern Conservative apologists to trace in the Reform of 1867 the development of a long-considered policy.

The truth is that the whole business was a sordid scramble for office. The odds were in favour of the Liberals, since in 1867 it was a liberal measure that was wanted ; and if, as Gladstone said, "The

governing idea of the man who directed the [Tory] party seemed to be, not so much to consider what ought to be proposed and carried, as to make sure that, whatever it was, it should be proposed and carried by those now in power"—if, as any rational survey undoubtedly indicates, that is a fair judgment, it certainly shows that the Conservatives had determined to win the race, whatever the odds against them, and whatever the means they had to employ in passing their rivals. Yet Gladstone's criticism was no less applicable to his own party. In the previous session he had himself declared that the Liberals would not accept the sort of reform which the constituencies were demanding; and yet, in spite of this candid assertion that the Liberal party were not prepared to equal the electorate in Liberalism, the following year saw them speeding pell-mell along the course of democracy, and eventually accepting a reform far more sweeping than any of their principles could justify. "Here," said Shaftesbury at the time, "are two tigers over a carcase; and each one tries to drive the other away from the tit-bits." Contemporary Victorians, at least, knew why they were driven to democracy.

Professedly, however, all this was in response to the demands of an insatiate people. And yet any demand for reform which existed in the country at the end of 1866, had been artificially created by the Liberals themselves in the course of that same year. Whatever the desire for the second reform act may have been, it certainly was not popular. Russell, it is true, had persisted in his periodic wooings of an indifferent people, but the people were not yet young enough to forget the last reform he had given them. In 1832 the poorer classes had pinned their faith upon parliamentary reform, and parliamentary re-

form had brought them no benefits. Their economic grievances remained unredressed, and it is astonishing that the innate constitutionalism of the English genius triumphed over the desolating disabilities of the workers at that period. But Chartist activities did them no more good than the reform of Parliament, and by the middle of the century the faith of the masses in any sort of parliament, reformed or unreformed, was as low as it could be.

Yet the Liberals could not be persuaded to let the sleeping dog lie, and in their desperation to do something at all costs for the revival of their party fortunes, they did it too thoroughly. When they began their reforming campaign in 1866, the people as a whole were apathetic, and the Liberals were compelled to make the most of such utterances as they could possibly represent in the light of a popular demand for reform. Popular it was not: its principal mouthpieces were Mill and Fawcett, both of them men of the cloisters; one of them most famous as a metaphysician, and the other capable of writing a book on Free Trade, at a time when Free Trade was again becoming a practical political question, with hardly a single table of statistics, or anything else from cover to cover than the amiable abstractions of the classical economists. They were supported, it is true, by Radicals like Bright: but Bright was the supreme representative of a type which revealed more completely than any other the eternal dependence of Liberalism upon the principles of the academies. Mill, Fawcett and Bright were all exponents of the Classical School of Economics: they were all truly philosophic radicals, and there was always more philosophy than iconoclasm in their propositions. During the course of the debates on the second Reform Act Mill il-

lustrated his detachment from practical politics by proposing to grant votes to women, and Fawcett and Bright voted for Mill's amendment. This was merely worrying the practical men, who were much more deeply concerned to settle the microscopic details of their reform than to consider any question of such breadth as Women's Suffrage. The pedants were put in their place by a suitable majority, and the conduct of affairs reverted to the men who knew their business.

Yet it was to these visionary Radicals that Russell and the Liberals turned in 1866 for an expression of a desired demand for reform. The expression was immediately forthcoming (for everybody admitted that the Radicals were in their element in the management of words), and it did its work too thoroughly. The masses developed a sudden revival of their dormant interest in reform, and knocked down the railings of Hyde Park to show they knew their mind. During the winter the wish for reform became really popular, and the Liberal Aeolus had loosed his winds.

To this extent the Liberals were responsible for the Conservative betrayal. The Conservatives, even in opposition, had been willing enough to let well alone, but by the time they came into office there was no avoiding a reforming course. Disraeli's disgrace lies less in his carrying a bill which betrayed the principles of his party, than in his making no effort to avoid or minimise the betrayal. Throughout the session he seemed to glory in the versatility with which he prevented the Liberals, time after time, from beating him in the scramble for popular favour. He was out frankly for the Conservative party, and both Conservatism and the Constitution might go hang so long as the effectiveness of his

leadership was not imperilled. The whole reforming movement was a fight between the parties for political supremacy, with the Constitution as the field of battle: and the Constitution suffered in the struggle as battlefields usually do. There is no possible moral justification for the course which Disraeli permitted himself to take. The only possible practical justification would have been success: and success was not forthcoming. In the interests of the Conservative party he compelled that party to abandon its honour: and the party was the first to pay the penalty. The electorate which it had called into being cast its votes against its creator, and the Conservatives were out of power until they were recalled after six years of mismanagement by the Liberals.

The last act of the Victorian reform comedy is merely an anti-climax, and a few words can bring us to the curtain. Amid all the complicated intricacies with which the second reform act abounds—scars of the desperate party struggle for points—its outstanding principle is clear. With a few minor exceptions, it gave the vote to the workmen who lived in the towns. From that time the balance of the electorate was democratic, in the sense that poor people heavily outnumbered the rich on the register. In practice, the working man has shown himself at least as conservative as his betters, but at any rate he is in command of the situation. Why the agricultural labourer was excluded in 1867 from the privilege accorded to his urban brother was not made clear; but there was a sort of kindly understanding on both sides that townsfolk, who lived in an environment created by the Victorians, were necessarily more intelligent than countrymen, who lived in an environment created by God. At any rate, it

soon became evident that mere consistency demanded the rectification of this unequal distribution of citizen rights, and as usual, it was Gladstone who did the obvious thing. The Third Reform Act was merely an extension of the Second: it did, in fact, add to the register nearly twice as many voters as its predecessor had added: but the essential principle was in both cases the same—the right of the poorest classes to the vote. The clauses of the Third Reform were written by the hand of Gladstone, but his hand was guided by the spirit of the dead Disraeli.

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By 1885 the Victorians had said their say on Parliamentary evolution, and the next Reform Act set about putting into practice those ridiculous visions of the philosophic Radicals which the Victorians had rejected. In other words, the more modern development of English democracy has been in a non-Victorian direction. It would, therefore, be very easy to condemn the Victorians for their sins of omission—for leaving undone what a later generation has found to be necessary. That, however, would also involve the condemnation of most cautious reformers—including ourselves, if ever our own reforms are found in future to be inadequate.

It is easier to attack the Victorians on their own ground. The world has yet to see its first satisfactory solution of the democratic problem, and the Victorians can hardly be blamed for failing with all their predecessors. It is not for their inability to solve a problem by which all ages have been baffled that the Victorians are to be censured, but for blind-

ing themselves to the limit of their own achievement. They manufactured a constitutional instrument which they had no intention of producing, and yet they were soon afterwards claiming to have solved the eternal constitutional riddle. In their quest for a wider citizenship they blundered upon universal suffrage, and then, having reached that solution by mistake, they regarded it as the perfection of their original design.

Once they had decided to adopt the political foundling which circumstances had foisted upon them, and to hush up the truth about its birth, they were only realising the genuine Victorian egoism in proceeding to paint it as the best of all possible offspring. They were never more thoroughly Victorian than in their tacit assumption that in establishing manhood suffrage they had ensured a perfect representation of every voter. The political classes of the Victorian period were themselves too enlightened to understand the ignorance of those below them. Their drowning clutches at the educational straw betray, indeed, a belated appreciation of the danger into which they had rushed; but they never realised that, so far from their having perfected the representative system, their newly enfranchised voters were, in fact, less efficiently represented by their own suffrages than by the votes of those who understood them better than they understood themselves. The opinion of the people was no better expressed after the second Reform than before it—indeed, the increased volume of sound uttered by the enlarged electorate merely served to distort what it wanted to say.

Moreover, the case against Victorian democracy goes deeper even than that. We are not merely wrong in trusting the claim of the Victorians to have made

democracy perfect, or even to have made democracy what they desired to make it. Certainly, their democracy was not perfect—if only because it excluded from political power all women but one, and then gave her more power than any man in the country. Quite as certainly their democracy assumed a shape which they disliked. But beyond even that, it is difficult to deny that the Victorians were, in fact, opposed to democracy altogether. The whole period was a fight against it. The Victorian political ideal was that of an aristocracy of intellect—and even then, of an intellect fundamentally academic. They were capable of appreciating Radicalism, but only the Radicalism of men like Bright and Cobden, who were all the more academic in outlook because they had never been to a university, and therefore had to prove that they were as good as people who had. The Radicalism of the Chartists, with its appeal to commonsense, behind the back of a tradition slowly broadening down from precedent to precedent, was beyond the bounds of Victorian sympathies. Chartism was ridiculed; its demands were refused — and the Victorians had declared themselves against democracy.

In the end, democracy beat them after all; but only after a stubborn defence by the Victorian politicians—a defence in which Radicals like Bright fought as well as any of the Tories. Bright was out for an aristocracy of industrialism, as Wellington or Salisbury were out for an aristocracy of birth; and in between them, the Liberals were no less aristocratic in their own way. Nobody wanted a real democracy, in which the people were the masters of the politicians; yet that was the sort of democracy which eventually came to pass. The

reasons for this defeat of the Victorians in their constitutional struggle have already been considered; but it is vital to remember that that struggle was against democracy and not for it, and that their boast of having planned and accomplished the constitutional millennium is merely one example—and perhaps the best—of their usual pretence that the *fait accompli* was what they had meant it to be. Victorian England appeared so successful to the Victorians, because the Victorians could never believe in the possibility of their own failure. It was that which enabled them to take pride in a democracy which they had desperately resisted: and it is that which will convince posterity that the constitutional evolution of Victorian England, was, after all, a sham.

III. Free Trade in Theory and Practice

"*To expect, indeed, that the freedom of trade should ever be entirely restored in Great Britain is as absurd as to expect that an Oceana or Utopia should ever be established in it.*" (*Adam Smith*, The Wealth of Nations).

THE essential things to remember with regard to the Free Trade movement are that it was at least as much philosophical as political; that philosophers were no less active than politicians in furthering its development, the former along lines mainly theoretical, the latter along lines mainly practical; and that the culmination of the whole movement was reached near the middle of the last century, at a time when both the theory and the practice of Free Trade had attained maturity of a sort, and before the emergence of that fundamental conflict of outlook between them, which in our own day has made real agreement virtually impossible.

In the early days of Free Trade, as usual in these cases, practice was the subservient and diffident handmaid of theory, and statesmen humbly followed, though with necessary caution, the advice of the professional economists. These economists were none of them Victorians: none of them so much as survived into the reign of the Queen; and it is, therefore, comfortably easy to maintain that in economics as in all the other chief departments of thought, the Victorians inherited a legacy of theory to which they contributed nothing original of their own, but which they sorted and classified and assimilated with enough success to make possible its translation into practice. In economics, at least, this was certainly the case. The known economists of the strictly Victorian period were in no sense original: they possessed too large a proportion of the assurance of their contemporaries to permit

that self-questioning without which originality can never flourish. They were sure of their facts, and they were surer still of their theories: and when once they had built up the theories into an adamantine system of economics, beside which the Queen's morality was elasticity itself, they presented it whole to the statesmen of their day as the final statement of the law of God, which had been reserved in the divine wisdom for an age which had proved itself capable of comprehending and applying it. The arch-priest of Victorian economics was Mill, and if he had known that future generations would use his immortal " Principles " as a starting-point for their researches, instead of the unalterable verdict of centuries of thought, he would probably have treated his own manuscript as he treated the yet more confident manuscript of Carlyle. If he had, the world of economists would have suffered an irreparable loss, for the value of Mill's work was precisely this, that it embodied in a reasoned system the fundamental propositions worked out by the economic fathers, and presented them in the form of a complete and enlightened text-book for the use of the students of a later age.

What Mill did at large was done also in little by the rest of the economists of his time; and it was they who reduced the hypotheses of the masters to a formal code of Free Trade morality. Here, as always, the Victorians drew their sustenance from their predecessors, and without some knowledge of the spade-work of these forerunners of the gospel of Free Trade it is impossible to understand the Word as it was finally elaborated by the Victorians themselves.

Adam Smith, of course, is accepted as the father of Free Trade, and there is no real reason for doubt-

ing his claim to the paternity, except that in an age like the eighteenth century his offspring would certainly have come to birth even if he had not been its originator. Burke had evolved a good many of Smith's theories long before *The Wealth of Nations* was written, and astonished the Scotch professor when he came to London by demonstrating to him the truth of his own original and undivulged principles. The age, in fact, was one in which freedom of all kinds, and freedom of trade by no means least of all, stood at an intellectual premium: and Rousseau had written his *Social Contract,* in which the aim behind all his wearying repetition of puerile and superficial inconsequences was the reversion of man to his primitive liberty. France, indeed, had its fill of liberty before the end of the century, but in England we were more cautious. Instead of Rousseau, we read the less subversive works of the Physiocrats, and even them we sent for a course of cautious dilution north of the Tweed before we accepted their conclusions. Smith, at any rate, drew largely upon the Physiocrats of France for his inspiration; the Physiocrats, as their name declares, demanded the rule of Nature in politics: and Nature knows no customs barriers. Smith's work was to redress the frankly metaphysical bias of the majority of the French thinkers. He was a professor of philosophy, and moral philosophy at that: but he contrived to infuse into the too subtly theoretical speculations of the Frenchmen a healthy proportion of expediency, and in the result he handed on Free Trade to the statesmen as a policy of expediency rather than a policy of mere speculation. In the French Revolution speculation went mad and destroyed itself. In the hands of English statesmen expediency climbed

haltingly over impediments which ought never to have been in the way, but it succeeded ultimately in reaching its destination.

There is at least one fundamental difference between the attitude of Adam Smith and that of the Physiocrats. The latter were out for a state of Nature, and therefore their chief interest was in agriculture. The Scotchman, on the other hand, aimed at expediency, and if possible expediency with money in it, and he therefore directed his attention to commerce. The Physiocrats, like their antithesis the English Corn Laws, sought first of all to bolster up the tilling of the soil. Smith was concerned with the Wealth of Nations and its increase, and he was convinced that that increase could best come through unrestricted commercial relations.

In another respect, the title of Smith's book marks that definite cleavage with economic tradition for which he is most famous. His interest was the Wealth of Nations, and not the wealth of a single nation, and in this he was the morning star of the modern internationalism, though, like another morning star, he can have had no conception of the historical niche he was to occupy. Mercantilism, the policy of national wealth, had held the ear of kings and cabinets since, perhaps, the fourteenth century. It had assumed at times fantastic shapes, but it masqueraded most frequently as the Bullionist Theory, the ghost of which is not yet laid. Roughly and superficially speaking, the exponents of this theory maintained that the wealth of any country varied in direct proportion with its gold reserve, and they therefore encouraged exports and discouraged imports in the hope of building up thereby an enormous fund of bullion. When, to-

wards the end of the eighteenth century, Smith and some others began to utter the now platitudinous notions that imports pay for exports and that excess of gold corrects and nullifies itself by the raising of prices all round, the political world was inclined to regard them as a new and perverse, but on the whole harmless, type of heretic. Smith, however, had influence in high places, and eventually his doctrines converted the younger Pitt, as they had already converted the mightier Burke and his party. Pitt, moreover, was young, and had not yet learnt the value in politics of ignoring an uncomfortable conscience, with the result that he immediately started to put the new theories into practice. Free Trade was already a thriving infant, and had reached the point (to which it again attained three-quarters of a century later) of a commercial treaty with France, when the French Revolution broke out, and after it the Napoleonic Wars: with the result that Pitt, a man whose genius was most fitted for the economic problems of a period of peace, killed himself in the attempt to weather a storm which he was unsuited to face, and economic reform, and with it Free Trade, was postponed for forty years.

This brings us to the period following the Napoleonic War, when all the usual post-war problems were as acute as they ever have been, and when the nations, awakened to a belated attempt to control their foreign politics, were inclined to specialise too exclusively upon these and to neglect the pressing issues nearer home. It was the age of Castlereagh and Canning; but it was also the age of Huskisson, who, being a minor minister, concerned apparently with administration rather than policy, and possessing none of those showy

attributes which recommended his colleagues to the people, was permitted to revolutionise the economic attitude of this country without attracting very much attention to what he was doing: with the result that history knows him better as the first man to be killed in a railway accident, than as the stepfather of Free Trade, who nursed the moribund child of Adam Smith during a dangerous illness, and restored it to a state of convalescence which made possible its complete recovery.

Huskisson was never a man for crises and effect (nothing in his life was more unlike him than the leaving it), and there is little more to chronicle about his work than a mere list of revised taxes. That revision, however, was the real beginning of Free Trade in England, and without it both Peel and Cobden would have occupied a very different place in the history books. The Navigation Acts, those bulwarks of English exclusiveness, which had attempted for centuries to base the prosperity of English shipping upon monopoly rather than upon competitive efficiency, were finally withdrawn, and in a generation English shipping increased by about fifty per cent. Huskisson followed this by the remission of duties, mainly upon raw materials: that upon silk was reduced by about ninety-five per cent., that upon wool by about eighty per cent., and in both cases the alarm of the manufacturers was falsified, as England began gradually to export, instead of importing, as hitherto, a balance of these commodities. Under Huskisson's influence this policy was continued for several years, and in every case the experiment (and it ought not to be forgotten that the courage of the experimenter in politics was needed by the statesman who made himself responsible for these measures) was justified by the event. Trade ex-

panded continuously, and the revenue suffered no contraction by reason of the duties remitted; and it is particularly significant that the fall in the general level of prices during the decade (1820 to 1830) of Huskisson's influence, was greater than that of any other decade in the century, and that only one other similar period witnessed a fall which was half as large. During the next ten years, while the country was anæsthetised into a false security by the complacent rule of the Whigs, development was generally arrested, but the Free Trade movement was well under way, and only the downfall of the Whigs was needed to secure its consummation.

This prolonged preamble has been necessary in order to make plain what everybody is inclined to forget—that England was already in all essentials a Free Trade country when the Queen came to the throne, at a time when Peel himself was still a confirmed Protectionist, and before even Cobden had heard of the Anti-Corn-Law League. This is a point of vital importance, since, although it is no longer fashionable to attribute the freedom of English trade to a sudden political cataclysm in 1846, Cobden retains in the popular mind the position which he originally appropriated for himself, as the statesman who was above all others responsible for making England a Free Trade country. That that is an entirely false estimate of Cobden's historical importance it ought not to be difficult to show. In the first place it is necessary to abandon for a moment the custom of modern historians, and to devote some passing consideration to dates. Cobden's first emergence into political importance was as a founder and leader of the Anti-Corn-Law League in 1838. Now in 1838 Huskisson had been

dead for eight years, and since the origination of his Free Trade policy prices had come down by something like twenty per cent., while customs duties had been enormously reduced on the material of the chief national industries. At the same time, in 1838, and until the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, Cobden's campaign was directed against the duty on one imported commodity only, when duties were actually being paid by over eleven hundred. In 1838, moreover, there can be no doubt that Free Trade was in the air, that the manufacturers of England were already becoming aware that their interests depended upon its speedy realisation, and that Cobden himself was no more than the vital expression of the feeling of the middle classes.

Victorian England was made for Free Trade, and Free Trade was inevitable. The Industrial Revolution had already enjoyed a century in which to work out its course : England was the greatest manufacturing country in the world, with all the advantages of the earliest competitor in the way of increasing returns. The middle and manufacturing classes had received in 1832 their charter of control over the political machine, and the opinions and interests of those classes exercised an ever-increasing influence on the government. At the same time the workers were politically dumb, and easy to exploit, while the best economic theory of the day justified their exploitation as the fulfilment of the greatest of natural laws. *Laissez-faire* was the orthodoxy of the day, and *laissez-faire* meant not only the liberty of the rich man to make what terms he could with his starving employees, but liberty also to cast off the shackles which tradition had imposed from above upon the commerce of the manufacturers : " Free Trade," said Cobden, was " the international law

of the Almighty;" and as men like Cobden were in the political and intellectual ascendant, they were bound to have their way.

It will be seen, moreover, that in the event it was neither Cobden nor his League that overthrew the final obstacle, but an unexpected ally mightier than both ; to do Cobden justice, he had always foreseen that some such external force as was actually supplied by the Irish famine would be needed in order to achieve the final victory. For eight years the League had marshalled all its forces against the Corn Laws, and then, not only were the Corn Laws themselves repealed through an entirely different agency, but those Laws proved in fact to have been not, as the Leaguers supposed, the embodiment of the Protectionist principle, but only the last lonely remnant of the Protectionist tradition. While the League was fighting the Corn Laws, even the Whigs had appointed, during their last year of office, a Committee on Imports which reported strongly in favour of Free Trade: and although Melbourne, who like Walpole a century before him let sleeping dogs lie as long as they would, only replied with a few tentative remissions of duty, the findings of the Committee were not lost upon Peel, who, as everybody knows, introduced during his five years ministry such a cumulative series of Free Trade budgets as effectually killed the protectionist system, although few men in the country were free enough from the illusion of the Corn Laws to realise the significance of what was being done.

In 1845 Cobden was fighting for a policy which was already achieved, and Peel was exhausting himself in applying artificial restoration to a protectionism that was already dead. One of the most difficult tasks of the historian of Victorian

England is to get behind the habitual and only half-conscious self-deception of the Victorians. They nourished slumdom and poverty, and called it *laissez-faire* and the will of God: they professed a morality of perfection, and deliberately but unconfessedly applied it only to their women. They exposed to the public gaze poignant emotions which they laboured to feel. In short, they were insincere, and their estimates of themselves are hopelessly untrustworthy. Among their self-deceptions was this of the Corn Laws. They convinced themselves, and they have convinced two subsequent generations, that Free Trade depended upon the abolition of the Corn Laws. They saw Cobden engaged for eight years in fighting the Corn Laws, and they assumed that he was finally responsible for their abolition. Then, linking in one grandly Victorian syllogism these faulty and inconsequent premisses, they concluded that Cobden was the founder of Free Trade ; and worst of all, their conclusion was accepted by Cobden himself, (if indeed he was not the originator of the whole idea), by his supporters and his opponents, and by public opinion ever since.

The truth is widely different, and it can be put quite concisely. Cobden was subject to all the limitations of his age and his class, and in his concentration upon the Corn Laws he was typical of the contemporary attitude. Neither he nor his fellows recognised the silent change which made England a Free Trade country before the Corn Laws were repealed. Like the rest of the newly-enfranchised middle-class, he was proudly exercising a newly achieved political weapon, but he was using it with a good deal of inexperience and too much blowing of trumpets: and he was striking in his least vulnerable parts a foe already moribund from

other causes. He directed the whole energies of his League against the Corn Laws for a period of eight years ; during that time the rhetoric of Cobden himself (and he was admittedly a born and finished orator) was combined in the assault with that of a large body of trained lecturers, with the ability of Thackeray (a young cartoonist, who also showed promise of literary gifts), with the gruff fulminations of a rising Chelsea writer named Carlyle, and with roughly a hundred tons of journalistic magazines and tracts of varying merit but unvarying conviction; while all these agencies were backed by the finances of North-country magnates who spent a quarter of a million on the purchase and multiplication of forty-shilling freeholds in the counties, with the object of increasing everywhere the votes cast for Repeal.

In fastening upon this one issue, Cobden, if he showed himself little of a statesman and less of a philosopher, had in fact chosen his ground with rare tactical skill. It was just at this time that Macaulay wrote, in words that have lived longer than any of Cobden's, that "the world generally gives its admiration, not to the man who does what nobody else even attempts to do, but to the man who does best what multitudes do well." During the first half of the nineteenth century multitudes were looking askance at the Corn Laws, when Cobden took them in hand and put into words what everybody had been trying to think for years.

In this, as usual, theory had preceded fact. Early in the century the economists were directed by Ricardo to the scientific study of rent, and by Malthus to the scientific study of population. After the Napoleonic Wars, when foreign competition began once more to be feared by English agriculture,

the land-owning classes who monopolised political power took measures to protect agriculture in the interests solely of their own rents, and the result was the Corn Law of 1815. Its specific provisions are unimportant, and they were several times amended; but its general effect was to keep up the price of bread and some other necessities, at a time when poverty was general among those classes which reckoned bread as their most important purchase. It is said that in 1840 beween eight and nine thousand people in Manchester were living on a weekly wage just about sufficient to buy one quartern loaf of bread : in Leeds, twenty thousand people were receiving even less than that ; in one Dorsetshire parish, the working classes averaged thirty-six to a house; and other districts were suffering in proportion. At the same time, the rents of the landowners were hardly diminished, and the inference was obvious that the national dividend was being unfairly distributed, through the retention of an undue share by one small class of the population. Ricardo had shown that rent is a payment for a differential advantage, and by 1840 the differential advantage was passing to the manufacturers. All these forces tended to focus attention on the Corn Laws, and it was for these reasons that Cobden attained prominence as the representative of his age.

Cobden, however, spoke only for one section of the community : his political and journalistic skill, and the extreme (and therefore to some extent misleading) clarity of his arguments, made him the spokesman of the whole movement, but his motives were the motives of the wealthy manufacturers, and it was even maintained by the most distinguished economic historian of the last generation that his principal aim was not the destruction of the Corn

Laws, but the cultivation of a trained political sense among those classes which had been enfranchised by the reform of 1832. At any rate, while Cobden was the protagonist of the manufacturers, and while various lieutenants of his busied themselves among the farmers and artisans, John Stuart Mill was exercising a similar influence upon philosophers, and at the same time the French economist, Bastiat, whose faculty for wrapping economic sophisms in attractive garments was even greater than that of Cobden, helped to keep in line general opinion both in England and on the Continent. All these forces were working simultaneously, and it is indisputable that between the foundation of the League and its dissolution in the hour of achievement, they made an incalculable difference to that public opinion without which no great reform could have been consummated. That, however, was the limit of their influence.

Nothing of all this was realised by contemporaries, and very little of it has been realised since by those historians who have relied too exclusively on the memoirs and letters of the time, which were written either by members of the landowning class, or by others who, with the landowners, accepted the Corn Laws as the essence of Protectionism, instead of its last surviving relic. Towards the end of the period of Peel's last ministry, the whole question was in fact in a thoroughly chaotic condition. Hardly a single mind in the country had appreciated the fact that the battle of Free Trade was already won, and that the grand, final assault of the Anti-Corn-Law League was being directed upon nothing more substantial than a battered shell. With the exception of the interested classes who owned the lands which the Corn Laws were designed to protect,

almost the whole country was convinced that Protection must be overthrown, although few realised how little of it was still standing. The manufacturers had been recently convinced by the speeches and statistics, the articles and cartoons (every one of them at least as interested as the prejudices of the landowners) of Cobden and his league : the working classes had been convinced long before, by the insistent logic of poverty and starvation, which left them no room for doubt that any change must be a change for the better: and the manufacturing and working classes made up at least three quarters of the population. Nevertheless, there was no political party, and no section of a political party, which was prepared to voice the feelings of this preponderating majority. Parliament was still controlled, and the parties were still led, by the class which had monopolised political power before the Reform Bill; and Parliament alone could repeal the Corn Laws which Parliament had passed. Lord John Russell, the effective leader of the Whigs, had committed his party to nothing more revolutionary than a fixed duty instead of a sliding scale. The Tories, under Peel, could find no better alternative than to minimise by pettifogging expedients the friction to which the sliding scale was inevitably subject. Peel himself was a wholly incalculable factor, and his incalculability was only intensified for the politicians by the disconcerting phenomenon of his honesty. Peel said he was a Protectionist ; his protectionist enemies declared that he was at heart a Free-Trader ; Cobden maintained that Peel possessed a "politico-economic mind" which was bound to bring him eventually into line with the League ; but unfortunately, Peel knew little or nothing of that Political Economy

upon which every Leaguer staked the salvation of the country.

There can, in fact, be little doubt that the Tory leader was merely feeling his way, with an intellectual straightforwardness which involved him in the confusion of seeing both sides of the question. For this reason it is possible to prove from Peel's writings and speeches, not only that he was a Free-Trader as early as 1838, but also that he was a Protectionist as late as 1845 ; and, of course, personal fancy has made the most of such adaptable material. But whatever the vacillation of Peel's opinions, his conduct moved pretty steadily in one direction, and that the inevitable direction of repeal. In 1840 the Whigs had appointed an Imports Committee to lift the responsibility of decision from the party shoulders. That committee had embarrassed the whole issue for the politicians, by its insistence on considering the claims of the manufacturing and labouring classes, no less than those of the landlords.. This was a desolating revolution of attitude; it found even the Whigs unprepared to act in accordance with the report, and it was after this that Russell fell back definitely upon the fixed duty. Peel, on his accession to power, was less oblivious of the significance of this new factor, and his budgets reflect his honest reaction to the stimulus. In his first year of office, he frankly threw prohibition overboard, and by his enormous reductions in the duties on raw materials pointed the way to complete freedom of trade in such commodities. For the next three years he pursued the same path with a steady consistency, until in 1845—again without his fully realising how far he had gone—Free Trade in almost all raw materials was definitely established.

The Anti-Corn-Law League, however, had a name

to justify, and it was not prepared to permit bread to remain dear when the price of other commodities was reduced by the amount of the repealed import duties. Its campaign was therefore continued, and every effort was concentrated upon the Corn Laws. Peel had reached the limit of his elasticity for the time being, and it is impossible to say how long war would have raged around these decrepit though devastating symbols of a vanished system, if political evolution had remained undisturbed. But for years Cobden had been consciously awaiting a catastrophe big enough to shake the obstructionism of his opponents : and at last the catastrophe arrived in the shape of famine. The English corn harvest was wretchedly inadequate for two successive years, and it was upon a more than ordinary scarcity that the Irish potato blight was superimposed. The English peasantry were already short of their staple food when the Irish peasantry found themselves practically foodless : and supplies had to be obtained at short notice from somewhere. It was a crisis which called out the best in the essentially opportunist statesmanship of Peel. Large cargoes of foreign corn were bought and distributed by the government, and the famine was at least alleviated. But alleviation was not enough to stay the swelling horror of death which marched inexorably in the path of the scarcity, and it was necessary to entice increasing supplies of corn by making its importation an attractive business proposition. For this reason Peel decided that policy and conviction and everything else must yield to expediency, and he declared for the abolition of the Corn Laws.

That he was right was proved by the conduct of the Whig leader, who burst in upon the last mental

agonies of his rival with his notorious "Edinburgh Letter." Russell, whose mastery of tactics at the time was a pale anticipation of the later achievements of Disraeli, not only declared in this letter that the Whig Party would demand the repeal of the Corn Laws, but also claimed to be doing Peel the service of providing him with a much-desired excuse for that repeal. No doubt he was justified in this : Peel was personally eager to abolish the Corn Laws, and was only restrained by the reluctance of some of his colleagues to throw overboard the principles on which they had been elected. At any rate, after the Edinburgh Letter it was clear that repeal would eventually be carried by the Whigs, if it were not carried immediately by the Tories ; and Peel felt safe in resigning on the issue. Even now, however, when the Edinburgh Letter was placarded all over the land in proclamation that their party had accepted Free Trade as a principle, the Whigs were unable to put that or any other principle before the mere machinery of office mongering ; and Russell was compelled to report to the Queen that, owing to Lord Grey's refusal to admit Palmerston's patent superiority as a foreign minister, he could not form a ministry. The Whigs had been forced by circumstances into the belated acceptance of a broad principle, and they had immediately split upon petty personal jealousies.

Peel therefore returned to power, faced with the immediate necessity to cheapen corn, and committed in consequence to the repeal of the Corn Laws, although he knew that the inevitable result would be the break-up of the Tory Party. He was the most unlucky party leader of the century. He had already twice abandoned the declared principles of the Tories ; first by his support of Catholic

Emancipation, and secondly by his support of the Reform Act. He knew that this third recantation would end his career as a statesman in power, but he knew also that he would be followed into retirement by some of the ablest men of his party, and in any case he was too straightforward to shrink from duty consciously realised. For the third time his honour compelled him to betray his friends. The Corn Duty was subjected to a reduction which met the exigencies of the immediate crisis, and in three years' time it was reduced automatically to a nominal shilling per quarter. The famine was arrested, and at the moment of his triumph Peel left Downing Street for ever, with the consciousness that he had temporarily annihilated the political power of the Tory Party.

That, as far as the Victorian period was concerned, was an end of the Free Trade question. It is true that now, for the first time, there existed a party definitely committed to Free Trade, and that in this matter they could count on the support of the Peelites to secure them an overwhelming majority whenever the question should arise. But it was precisely the same circumstance as had led to the existence of this overwhelming majority, which also determined that the question of Free Trade should never arise again in Victorian times. If there was a Free Trade majority in the House of Commons in 1846, there had been a Free Trade majority of electors for some years previously : England was essentially a Free Trade country long before the repeal of the Corn Laws became practical politics ; and if the House of Commons showed no subsequent desire to re-open the issue, it was merely reflecting the wishes of its constituents, who were, for the most part, members of the manufacturing

classes. The manufacturers were for *laissez-faire* in all things ; and if they were restrained by morality and by statute from permitting the free play of natural forces in their factories, they were all the more insistent that those forces should be unhampered in the region of commerce. The Economics of the Classical School had prevailed even over the Conservatism of the politicians ; and Classical Economics was all in favour of the manufacturers, at a time when English manufacture was so far ahead of foreign competition that it was more completely subject to Increasing Returns than it has ever been at any subsequent period. The manufacturers controlled a majority of Parliamentary votes ; the Free Trade question was therefore banished from Victorian politics, and as late as the last decade of the century the greatest living English economist could declare that nobody desired that it should ever be reintroduced.

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He was wrong : a younger contemporary of his own, who had studied his Economics with more reference to historical facts than to *a priori* deductions, was already preparing to furnish the intellectual justification for that Protectionist movement which sprang into life during the earliest years of the twentieth century. That movement, whether it was reflected in academic works like those of Cunningham, or in political activities like those of Chamberlain, was the result of long processes which had developed unhindered beneath the surface of Victorian politics. Once again the first impetus came from the theorists, and it was only after the theories had been fully developed that

the politicians succeeded in discovering practical means for their expression.

The Free Trade triumph of 1846 was in fact entirely illusory, and its later manifestations only obscured more vital though unnoticed developments in a reactionary direction. At first, however, those manifestations were exceedingly conspicuous. Not the least of them was the immediate acceptance of Cobden by the British people as the official apostle of its commercial policy. Peel was relegated to the background of party obloquy : Cobden was raised to the highest pinnacle of popularity, and within a few months he had convinced both himself and public opinion that he was the profoundest and most practical economist of his day, whereas in fact he was merely the most noisy of the popular promulgators of other people's ideas. However that may be, Cobden persuaded his countrymen to accept him at his own intellectual valuation, and he was himself only one of many who were amazed that he was not invited to join the cabinet which Russell formed immediately after the fall of Peel. He was convinced that his moral authority in this country was higher than that of anyone else : he was convinced, too—and with justice—that most Englishmen agreed with his estimate. High Politics, however, were temporarily barred to him, now that Russell had failed to register in the obvious way the views of the electorate, and now that the one form of opposition to which he was accustomed had been rendered useless by its own success. He therefore embarked, with all the assurance of the worst sort of Victorian complacency, upon a tour of the chief countries of Europe, in the firm persuasion that his word would be sufficient to overthrow the customs barriers of a whole continent. He was

received in turn by Louis Philippe, by Metternich, by the Pope, and by the monarchs of Spain and of Russia, with a careless and sceptical interest which he mistook in most cases for acquiescence ; in 1847 he returned, convinced that he had heralded the passing of protection everywhere.

The immediate future brought only disillusionment. Duties remained in all countries undisturbed : and Free Trade promised after all to appeal to none but Englishmen. In the meantime, Cobden formulated in exacter terms the task which was to succeed his leadership of the Anti-Corn-Law League. This was to be the conversion of Europe to the principles of *laissez-faire*, with the ultimate aim of abolishing military as well as economic warfare, and with more than an oblique glance at the stability of the British Empire.

In England, at least, his persistence bore fruit ; the principles of Free Trade gained a firmer grip upon the intelligence as well as upon the imagination of the man in the street, and in 1860 Cobden at last persuaded the government into the conclusion of a reciprocity treaty with France. Reciprocity, indeed, had been anticipated by Peel no less than by Cobden as the legitimate consequence of free imports ; and yet fourteen years had passed before the first reciprocity treaty was concluded. In 1860, however, the ruler of France was one of the most romantic and incalculable forces of the nineteenth century ; and once persuaded of the virtues of Cobden's recommendations, he rushed with avidity into political courses where Louis Philippe had feared to tread. Commercial treaty followed commercial treaty in rapid succession ; and one by one Belgium, Italy, Sweden, Norway, Switzerland and the German Zollverein,

were given to taste of the sweets of reciprocity which Napoleon III. had first received at the hands of Cobden.

These signs—and all the treaties were made within the space of five years—of the ascendency of Free Trade principles in the diplomatic counsels of Western Europe, were followed by similar symptoms in America ; and at the same time the fruits of the Exhibition of 1851 were maturing in a more vivid and widespread realisation of the value of the international exchange of commodities. English opinion was convinced that Europe was on the verge of a general consummation of the Free Trade ideal. And once more, English opinion was wrong. The foliage was fullest just before the fall of leaf. The ripening popularity of Free Trade was the maturity of early decline; and again the hidden undercurrent of events was of deeper significance than their manifestations on the surface.

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This time the pendulum had swung its speculative limit, and it was already swaying political tendencies in the direction of Protection, at a time when mere political events spoke of nothing but the antithesis of Protection. If general opinion had been mistaken in the early 'forties about the real position of Free Trade, it was no less mistaken about it in the early 'seventies. At the earlier period it had failed to realise that Free Trade in England was already an accomplished fact ; and now it was failing to realise that the reaction was well under way, and that beneath the ostentatious surface of political reciprocity the quiet evolution of economic theory was accomplishing its inevitable work.

While Europe in all its corners was noisily forging the bands of Free Trade by treaty ; while the Classical economists were proclaiming, with all the assurance of their age, the eternal truth of the freedom of international commerce ; when the wind and the earthquake and the fire of orthodox economics had made themselves heard in all the land—just then the small voice of dissension emerged slowly above the din. Before long doubts were felt, at any rate by the practical politicians ; doubt was succeeded by conviction, conviction by policy, and policy by political action ; and the century went out with Europe more solidly protectionist than ever.

As in the days of Adam Smith, the new movement began with a book, and a book written by one who was less a politician than a philosopher. It was in 1841 that Friedrich List had published his *National System of Political Economy ;* and it would perhaps be impossible to find better proof that the Free Trade revolution in England was complete before either Peel or the League assumed control of it, than this fact that the philosophical counterswing had begun five years before the Repeal, and even before Peel's first introduction of Free Trade principles into his Budgets. Before long the *National System* had taken rank as the charter of a new Protection, and a Protection as frankly national in its basis as Free Trade had been frankly international. List was no altruist. He was a philosopher in an age which saw more clearly than any other that Nature was red in tooth and claw; he was a German at a time when the supreme wish of every German was to shake off his metaphysical shackles and accomplish something practical—above all to accomplish, for the first time in history,

the union into a single political community of the German-speaking brotherhood. He was an economist, and he knew that the Classical economists had elaborated in England that doctrine of *laissez-faire* which was doing so much to strengthen the financial and political position of their own country. He realised that England was riding easily towards international supremacy, and he knew that it was borne along on the back of a political economy which concealed beneath the appearance of a cosmopolitan unselfishness the reality of a selfish national ambition. The English economists had proclaimed the principles of free international commerce, and they had shown sound logical justification for their contentions ; but whatever the motives of the English economists, the English politicians had accepted and applied their teaching, not because of its philosophical truth, but because of its national advantages. England was first in the field throughout the earlier part of the Industrial Revolution ; that revolution was due in the first place to the machines which the English had invented ; and before Europe could touch those machines they were held up by patent after patent until England was safely clear of the dangers of foreign competition. Nobody can blame the English for that. Every inventor is entitled to his royalties, and the Nonconformist patentees of the later eighteenth century were, reasonably enough, as tenacious of their pecuniary rights and advantages as Nonconformists always are. Consequently, the machines of Europe and the engines which drove them were nearly all designed, or made, or both, in England ; and of course there were far more of them in England than anywhere else. The results were obvious. English manufacturing methods

were a generation in advance of those of any other country ; and in consequence, English industry was working under increasing returns, at a time when foreign industry was still trying to find its feet. In circumstances such as these the principle of *laissez-faire*, in the shape of Free Trade between competing countries, is as equitable as it was in the shape of unrestricted competition between the organised capitalists and the unorganised work-people of the early nineteenth century. In both cases the lack of restriction favours the party with the initial advantages ; and in the world of industry List knew perfectly well that the initial advantages lay with England. England was pursuing an economic policy which in theory, certainly, was altruistic, but which in practice told very heavily in her own favour. He was a German scholar, and therefore a logician; he was a German professor, and therefore patriotic ; and the logic of his patriotism led him towards an economic policy which should benefit his own nation no less than the English nation had benefited by the policy of Free Trade. It was this policy which he called his *National System of Political Economy*.

In this suggestion that Political Economy, just raised by the classical economists to the dignity of an abstract science, could be made to serve the narrow objects of nationality, List was, of course, running his head against the opinion of contemporary scholarship, and, like many another revolutionary of the study, he attempted to propitiate the intellectual gods of his age. The Classical Economists thought frankly of the welfare of the individual, and they regarded the state as a merely subordinate mechanism devised to secure to the individual his private comfort. There was no narrow patriotism

about the Classical Economists; the world was their parish, and the most consistent of them accompanied Cobden into serious doubts of the legitimacy of empire—even of the British Empire. List was, therefore, careful to explain that he desired national strength, not as an end in itself, but as a means to this accepted end of the welfare of the individual. In this he contrasts sharply with the protectionists of a later date, who base their economic creed openly upon their patriotism, and most of whom, at any rate, regard the interests of their country as infinitely more important than the sum of the individual interests which they comprise. This was not the position of List. His system of economics was national only because the national policy would subserve the interests of the individual, just as in England the national policy was resulting in fabulous accumulations of individual wealth.

The inspiration of List's work was drawn admittedly from a consideration of the conduct of English statesmen; but his book was published in 1841, and it is, therefore, impossible to regard it as a direct reaction from political acts which had no manifestation until the following year. It was much rather a reaction from the tendencies which led to those manifestations. His position can be put quite shortly. English manufacture was flourishing most in Free Trade conditions, because English manufacture was subject to those increasing returns which are the reward of early enterprise—profits, to fall back again upon the orthodox phraseology of the Classical economists, are the rent of ability. English ability had been forward in its enterprise, and it was drawing this "rent" in reward for the differential advantage which it had secured for itself. German industry at the same

time could expect no such rent, because it had obtained no such differential advantage; rather it was still in the incipient stages in which decreasing returns are the rule. Open competition would, therefore, kill it. Nascent industry such as this needs care of a special sort, protection from the dangers which threaten its life. Such protection is afforded by judicious taxation at the expense of foreign competition. At first, admittedly, the individual will suffer for the benefit of the national industry; but once the national industry is established, the individual will get his due share of the increased wealth which is produced in consequence.

It was by this ultimate emphasis on the rights of the individual that List brought himself back into line with Classical Economics. It followed inevitably from this position that the Protection he advocated was suitable only for countries which had not reached their full industrial stature, and that once industrial maturity was attained, the Protection ought once again to be dropped. Protection, in fact, was an interim diet, and not a staple food, and List himself confessed that he saw no reason why England should pay any attention to his teaching, or question the wisdom of her own conversion to Free Trade. List was a relative and not an absolute protectionist, and even Mill, the protagonist of the Classical Political Economy, granted him a grudging assent in the later editions of his *Principles*. Thus, in theory at any rate, the ultimate truth of the Free Trade position was so far unassailed. List merely maintained that since the Industrial Revolution had made manufacture the surest road to individual and national wealth in Western Europe, Protection was necessary as a temporary expedient until the backward countries

of Western Europe had placed themselves on a sound industrial basis.

Nevertheless, the seed had been sown: for several generations Europe had paid homage to an economic theory which drew its strength from the assumption of ultimate perfectibility, and now, for the first time since Adam Smith (whose practical reservations everybody had apparently forgotten in the general enthusiasm for his theories), responsible opinion had ventured to demand that theories should be subordinated to facts, and that perfectibility should give place to policy in the control of economic conduct. It was a contention with a direct appeal to the interest of national manufacturers, and to the patriotism of everybody; and thus it came about that while Cobden was waving the banners of reciprocity over the head of an apparently acquiescent Europe, the politicians of those countries which had not yet begun to adopt Free Trade decided to stay where they were, and the politicians of England and France began wonderingly and with hesitation to reconsider their position.

The wonder and the hesitation were accentuated by the feeling that something was wrong. The apostles of Free Trade had promised good results, and the good results had followed unfailingly for several decades, while nothing was seen of those evil consequences which had been prophesied by a dissenting few. But by the end of the 'seventies it was becoming clear that evil consequences were at any rate a possible factor in the situation. England was the principal laboratory in which the Free Trade experiment was being conducted, and it was in England that its reactions were being most closely watched. Would the experiment be justified

by its results? Was England to advance in the courage of her convictions to yet greater prosperity, or was she to prove the deluded victim of a merely *doctrinaire* philosophy? Granted that her manufacturers were sure to benefit, would she pay the penalty in an agricultural decline sufficiently marked to condemn the whole policy of Free Trade? For two decades and more Europe awaited the result, and for two decades and more England seemed wholly justified in her new line of conduct. Manufactures flourished, and agriculture did not decay. In this quarter of a century the Victorians watched with their customary complacency a thirty per cent. increase in the population, a four hundred per cent. increase in manufactured exports, and an immeasurable rise in the standard of living; at the same time they convinced themselves that agriculture was not suffering, and, like so many more of the ill-considered and unwarranted platitudes of the age, this one has forced itself into the hardly better-considered histories written about it. They were wrong; agriculture was, in fact, rapidly heading for decay; but the conviction was all that mattered; and for a generation Victorian England flattered itself that it was gaining on the agricultural swings as well as on the industrial roundabouts.

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Thus the principles of Free Trade, so completely unassailable in theory, seemed as completely vindicated in practice, when suddenly, and without expectation, disturbing symptoms began to appear. In 1870, by a series of accidents, which nevertheless convinced those who put their trust in statistics, rather less wheat was imported than in the first

year of the same decade: whereas the next ten years saw wheat imports double themselves. This was disconcerting enough, and it was coupled with the rising complaints of the farmers that ruin was facing them. In short, it was becoming alarmingly clear that the agricultural decline which the Protectionists had threatened as a result of Corn Law repeal was, in fact, beginning to set in, and that the apparently unqualified prosperity of the previous generation was purely superficial. As usual, explanations after the event were immediately forthcoming. Obviously the inevitable decay of agriculture had merely been delayed by special circumstances. How was it possible at once to admit the unrestricted competition of foreign produce and at the same time to avoid the betrayal of the farming interests? And if the land was permitted to fall out of cultivation, on what was the State to draw for army recruits and for the food of the people—especially in war-time, when it was so necessary to increase the domestic supply of both? As for the prosperity of the period immediately following the repeal, when manufactures had gained the promised impetus, while foreign agricultural competition had not appeared to support the prophecies of the critics—there was an easy answer to that. How could Russian corn have competed with the domestic supply, when Russia had been convulsed by the Crimean War before she could possibly adapt herself to the new conditions? And how could American corn step into the breach, until the Civil War had decided whether or not the States were to remain united? But by 1870 the effects of both these wars were wearing off, and English farmers were feeling the pressure of foreign competition. Now at last the condition of Europe was

such as to subject Free Trade to a reasonable test; and as it became increasingly manifest that agriculture was to be supplanted by pasture in consequence of the menace from abroad, as statesmen appreciated with growing conviction the danger of leaving the country dependent in war time on imported food, political exigencies once again raised their heads and demanded that economics should return to its place as the subordinate handmaid of the politicians.

Naturally enough—for even English professors are human—it was at this juncture that the historians realised that Adam Smith had not been quite the out-and-out free trader that their predecessors had represented him to be. It was conveniently remembered that the great master himself had pronounced the Navigation Acts—the natural anathema of every sound Classical economist—to be " the wisest of all the commercial regulations of England "—since " defence is of much more importance than opulence." And so this became the slogan of the new Protection. Free Trade is good—yes: in a world that lives at peace. But by 1870 even England was beginning to realise that her dream of unbroken peace was in danger of a rude awakening. In 1870 two new nations came into being; and both Germany and Italy showed signs of wishing to have a finger in the European pie. In the same year Napoleon, the dreamer, made way for the aggressive third republic, which showed its economic opinions by withdrawing from Cobden's Treaty of 1860; and Europe felt the disturbing consciousness of a militant democracy burning to avenge a military humiliation. America was again a united nation, bent on progress. Russia had pulled herself together, and was once more strain-

ing at the limitations imposed by English policy upon her eastern empire. Before 1880, Disraeli had taken credit to himself for keeping the country out of a grand European conflagration. By 1890 the new and powerful German Empire was already a likely foe; and by 1900 the enmity had been declared, and the Boer War was in being.

It was this spectacle of a Europe at issue which did more than anything else to encourage the new movement in the direction of Protection. List had shown that new nations need protection for their nascent industries, and the new nations of Europe were equally conscious of their nationality and of their desire for national wealth. At the same time, the English were beginning to feel that Protection was good for older industries also, if their natural position was weak in itself. It seemed clear that the industrial specialism which had been safe during the comparative peace of the nineteenth century, had in fact put English agriculture into such a position; and by 1900 it was no longer possible to hope for continued peace. What if the impending war found England deprived, by her boasted insularity, of a safe supply of foodstuffs? In twenty-eight years, from 1875 to 1903, three million acres of English land went out of cultivation—well over twenty-five per cent. of the total area. Protectionist statisticians were able to make great play with figures such as these, and one of the best-known of them calculated that in the same period the English farmers had lost between them more than £1,000,000,000.

At the same time England had experienced, as a result of the Boer War, that fervour of distended patriotism which was already heating the continental nations to an incandescence of aggression.

Clearly the soil was ripe for a belated fertilisation of the parenthetic seed sown by Adam Smith. The nation was in the mood to receive any sort of doctrine which emphasised the need for national preparedness, and those who were inclined to tax the foreigner for the mere fun of the thing, were able to back their inclinations by quoting the father of orthodox economics. In other words, the arrogance manifested by the vague nationalism of the late nineteenth century was easily reinforced in England by an aspect of Smith's teaching, which had been wantonly neglected for a century by Smith's most ardent disciples. The necessity of getting ready for war, as well as of making money during peace, was grateful in itself to those who cared more for the wealth of England than for the wealth of nations, and it was possible to support their ideas by arguments which even the classical economists, for all their passionate adherence to Free Trade, were still unable to refute.

Besides, it was easy to prove that all the advantages which Smith had foretold, as the result of Free Trade, were now obtainable without the incidental necessity of declining those other advantages, which the Free Traders were prepared to forfeit in the interests of the more substantial gains of a united international economy. The British Empire was itself an international society with resources of international amplitude. When *The Wealth of Nations* was published, the British Empire had been a very small affair, confined almost exclusively to the northern half of America, and before Smith died it was very much smaller even than that. But by the end of the nineteenth century the sun itself had repeatedly declined to set upon it, and the British race had at its disposal the products of every

known sort of climate. Here was the grand opportunity: to apply to the different parts of the British Empire the Free Trade principles of Adam Smith, and simultaneously to apply to the Empire as a whole those principles of national defence which Smith himself had confessed to be paramount—this was to gain at once the material wealth and philosophical content of the classical economists, and the national security so urgently demanded by those who feared the dangers of applying undiluted logic to the politics of an unholy world.

The cycle of benefits was complete—so complete that few sceptics ventured to spoil the argument by insisting that in war time the whole assumption of imperial sufficiency was no less dependent on naval power than the assumption of international division of labour: and in any case, the politicians soon contributed their share to the solution of any such difficulty by putting the English naval programme on the two-power basis. Everything was, therefore, favourable for the advent of the new Protection, which is known as Imperial Preference.

Moreover, the war which had provided the national enthusiasm required for such a movement, had provided also the man to guide that enthusiasm into the proper channel. Plenty of people believed that Joseph Chamberlain, the Colonial Secretary, deserved as much credit as anybody for the victory over the Boers; and Chamberlain was not the man to neglect opportunities. In his thirties he had retired from business with a fortune due almost entirely to his own supreme gift for organisation. Since then he had shown himself to be a brilliant politician, both in office and out of it. He had, they said, won the Boer

War—again by organisation. And now he became the self-constituted manager of the imperialist business, as Kipling was the prophet of the imperialist faith. It was, therefore, natural enough that he should direct the demand for Imperial Preference, and in 1903 he launched his movement for Tariff Reform, and so started the free trade question upon its twentieth century career. But that is in no sense Victorian.

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Victorian economics were vitiated, like so much else Victorian, by stolid adherence to rule of thumb. The Victorians were always suffering for their faith that a principle, once discovered, must needs be of universal application. They twisted Adam Smith into meaning that Free Trade was always infallible, and on the basis of premisses thus falsely acquired, they built a superstructure of *a priori* reasoning which established Free Trade as an axiom. Free Trade is not an axiom: it may be good, or it may be bad: but it is not always either. That was the mistake of the Victorians; and it was due, like a good many more mistakes of theirs, to their lack of political imagination. The one Victorian who was ready to apply imagination to politics was Disraeli, and he was not ready to apply it if it interfered with his chances of political success. He therefore threw overboard his sensible conviction that Free Trade was not a principle, but an expedient; and in accepting Free Trade for Mid-Victorian England he pandered to the rest of the Mid-Victorians in professing that the same policy was suited, not to an age, but to all time.

Nevertheless, it was Disraeli's convictions, and not his professions, which were right. Free Trade

was the best diet for Victorian infancy, and early Victorian England thrived upon it. But for the old age of the Victorians a change of food might be necessary, and instead of tackling the problem by commonsense and experiment, they tackled it along the lines of logical deduction — from premisses which were sound in 1840, but at least questionable in 1880. That is why Fawcett's vindication of Free Trade as an eternal verity—at a time when England could persuade nobody else in Europe to touch it—meandered complacently through nearly 200 theoretical pages, ninety per cent. of which contained no economic figures whatever. Fawcett convinced the conservatives: and at that time most of the Liberals, including Gladstone, were conservative enough in economics. But he failed to convince the business men, whose success depended on cautious enterprise. Consequently it was the business men who took over the whole question: and the political rebirth of Protection was accomplished by the midwifery of a Birmingham ironmaster, just as the political birth of Free Trade had been accomplished by that of Lancashire cotton-masters. The satisfaction felt by the Brights and Cobdens of the League, backed though it was by the support of current theories, had its roots in business interest: and it was therefore natural enough that business interest, and not political metaphysics, should assume responsibility for overhauling Victorian theories and revising the economic attitude of an era no longer Victorian.

IV. The Irish Problem

"Home-rule no doubt is a nuisance, and especially a nuisance because the professors of the doctrine do not at all believe it themselves." (*Trollope*, Autobiography).

IN the case of a country where the curse of Cromwell is still a matter of practical politics, it is clearly difficult to isolate with any success its history during a single period. And the roots of the Irish problem drive deeper into the subsoil of history even than the heedless misconceptions and deliberate maltreatment of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. "A starving population, an absentee aristocracy, and an alien church, and in addition the weakest executive in the world"—this had been young Disraeli's summary of the issues at stake; but that aristocracy, that church and that executive had been superimposed centuries before upon a set of institutions with which they were utterly at variance. The essence of the Irish question has always been, and must always be, the survival of Irish culture, and that culture is not merely pre-Cromwellian, it is pre-Saxon: the genesis of the Irish problem, with all its subtle ramifications, lies more truly in the sixth than in the sixteenth or the nineteenth century. Irish civilisation was a flourishing affair when all our English fathers worshipped stocks and stones; and Ireland has never forgotten the age when she was the sole light of intellectual Europe. The individuality of the original Irish nation has persisted into an age with which it is inevitably out of sympathy, and that lack of sympathy is visible in each of the three manifestations of the problem down to our own days.

This threefold character of the issues at stake

is clearly foreshadowed in the early prognosis of Disraeli which has just been quoted. The subsequent and final diagnosis of the specialists has made some slight alteration in the balance and emphasis of that preliminary forecast; but the three essential elements are there. The problem is one of politics, of land tenure, and of religion, and in each of these three fundamental elements of English civilisation there is a clash with the fundamental elements of that Irish civilisation which is at once older and more completely ineradicable than our own. The Teutonic cultures have developed and strengthened themselves by constant adaptation to prevailing circumstances: the culture of the Celts, at any rate of the Celts across the Irish Sea, stands scornfully intransigeant throughout its history: and if there is a problem of the constitution, a problem of the land, and a problem of the Church of Ireland, that is because the coarse and indiscriminating Saxon has sought with blind persistence to graft upon the political, agricultural and ecclesiastical conceptions of the Irish other conceptions with which they are too thoroughly incompatible for any process of grafting to be successful.

It is true, in the first place, that English methods of dealing with Irish difficulties have been repeatedly perverse: thoughtless intimidation, weak and inconstant conciliation, and a most unfortunate series of broken pledges, have all done their share towards building up those solid ramparts of incredulity and distrust from which statesman after statesman has been hurled back defeated. Yet the root of the matter is less in this fervent Irish conviction of the fundamental dishonesty of the English, than in those subtle nuances of racial thought and attitude which cast their shadowy

impenetrability between peoples, and prevent that preliminary community of the bases of reason and argument without which agreement, let alone sympathy, is eternally unattainable. The Irish have their own notions of politics, of land tenure, and of religion, and they are not the notions of the English. The Irish problem is therefore at bottom the same as the problem of India, of Egypt, and even of the dominions—it is a problem of thinking ourselves outside the groove of our civilisation, of casting away the preconceived truisms of our national culture, and of realising with sympathy the entirely different axioms of an entirely different national character. Irish politics need to be treated on an Irish basis: and although the solutions attempted by the Victorians were in themselves a remarkable and most praiseworthy revolution in the English attitude towards Ireland, they failed on the whole to provide anything more than merely superficial treatment of symptoms. The disease itself was left to the physicians of a later age, which perhaps has realised at last that a revolution in attitude alone is not sufficient to solve the Irish problem: what is necessary is a revolution in mental processes.

Even mental processes, however, need facts upon which to work, and the facts in the case of Ireland are not obscure. They are, indeed, too well known to need repetition. Nevertheless, the Irish problem of the Victorians cannot be decently appreciated without constant remembrance of previous times, and some sort of recapitulation is necessary.

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It is not always clearly realised, by those whose acquaintance with history is based mainly upon in-

troduction by a text-book, that Irish Home Rule is no new thing—that before the Union there was Grattan's Parliament, and that Grattan's Parliament was merely the last of a long series of Parliaments which sat in Ireland, and which were at least as representative of the Irish people in the eighteenth century as the English Parliament was of the English people in the same period. That, indeed, may be small consolation, since neither Parliament succeeded in being decently representative at all. The English Parliament represented only the English landowners, and the Irish Parliament only the Irish Protestant landowners: and both classes were so small a minority of their respective populations as to be almost equally unrepresentative.

The grievances of Ireland in the eighteenth century were not, therefore, that she had no really representative institutions in an age when really representative institutions were unknown on this side of the Atlantic, but that her government was not allowed to govern, nor her legislature to legislate. The Irish Parliament was just about as representative or as unrepresentative as the English Parliament: but whereas the English Parliament could and did legislate fully and frequently for England, and, in its more foolish moments, for the colonies as well, the Irish Parliament had no such privilege. There was a whole series of prohibitory statutes and orders in council, from Poyning's law in the fifteenth century to the more deliberately vindictive Declaratory Act of the eighteenth, which gagged the Irish Parliament, feeble and atrophied though it was, with the necessity of submitting all its bills for preliminary inspection, and all its laws for subsequent ratification, by the executive at

Westminster. The Irish Parliament before the Union was, in fact, nothing more than a ventriloquist's dummy seated upon the knees of the Westminster politicians, and capable of uttering nothing more than the semi-articulate platitudes which the latter chose to put into its mouth.

This was the only type of Home Rule which Ireland had known since the English chose to interest themselves in her destiny. Nor was this all. Political servitude was bad enough, but the Irish have always shown themselves competent to override purely political exigencies. Ireland was not merely gagged, but the gag was not removed at meal-times; and however provoking enforced silence may be to the Irish genius, the provocation endured through a course of systematic starvation is immeasurably more unendurable. The English treatment of Irish commerce and manufacture in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was nothing less than that. The Navigation Acts hit Ireland as they hit the colonies, and they were reinforced by other statutes which had been passed with the deliberate aim of strangling the incipient industries of the country after the Restoration. Prices were artificially raised against producer and consumer alike by an English law which diverted Ireland's share in colonial produce through English ports, where duty had to be paid. The natural facilities which Ireland possesses for cattle trading were stultified by a legislative ban on cattle export; and lest the vigour of the north-east should find its natural vent in a prosperous textile manufacture, any signs of nascent development in that direction were effectively crushed from time to time by the English Parliament. Ireland, in fact, was treated worse than the colonies, even under

the old colonial system; but whereas the colonies at least possessed in their own legislatures an outlet for the ventilation of their grievances, Catholic Ireland was permitted to speak only with a Protestant tongue.

This was the third of the capital grievances of the eighteenth century Irish; and it is in this sphere — the sphere of religion — that the Irish people suffered most from the perverse inability of England to keep the most specific of her promises. The century began under the stigma of the Broken Treaty of Limerick, by which the Jacobite Irish of the Revolution had been induced to lay down their arms on the explicit assurance that the religious privileges which they had enjoyed under the later Stuarts should be at least maintained. That assurance had been wantonly disregarded by the English, and the pacification brought with it not peace, but a sword, in the form of a systematic penal code which struck at the roots even of the most intimate social and domestic ties of Catholic Irish life. The century, thus ignominiously begun, ended in ignominy still greater. If the effects of English oppression were unfortunate, the effects of English attempts at conciliation were nothing less than disastrous. Tardy amends were made at the end of the eighteenth century, but they were made in the worst possible spirit. Eighteen years before the Union the Irish Parliament was unmuzzled, only to reveal the fact that the Irish Parliament could never speak with an Irish voice, since no Catholic could participate in its debates, or even in the choice of its members. England, however, was in a reasonable frame of mind, and the commercial concessions with which Pitt began his ministry were supplemented by an advance towards religious equality:

and a century after the Broken Treaty Irish Catholics received the franchise, and Lord Fitzwilliam was sent across to complete their pacification. Then came another of those insensate blunders into which the English in Ireland blindly stumble from time to time. Fitzwilliam considered himself empowered to promise complete emancipation to the Catholics, and said so. Ireland appeared at last on the verge of possessing a Parliament which could really speak for her people, when Fitzwilliam was suddenly recalled, and the door of the Irish Parliament was again slammed in the face of the Catholics; and instead of winning the gratitude of Ireland, England found itself saddled with the curse of yet another broken promise.

That, however, was not enough. Pitt was conscientious, and he was determined that nothing should hinder him in his efforts to do justice by the Irish. Rebellion and maladministration had already condemned the recently acquired independence of the Irish Parliament, and after eighteen years of liberty its voice was hushed into silence by the Union. The Union, however, was only a fragment of Pitt's plan for Ireland, which included complete Catholic Emancipation: and the Union was carried through the Dublin assemblies, not only by the sordid jobbery of Castlereagh, but by the specific promise of the British Premier that Ireland should abandon the muffled mumblings of its own parliament only in return for complete freedom of speech by freely-elected members at Westminster. This promise went the way of all the rest, not because Pitt was a villain—the perfidy of Albion has rarely been the result of villainy, almost always of a perverted and inconstant sense of righteousness—but because the capricious fanaticism of the periodic

lunatic upon the throne could not be crossed without causing a relapse into one of his periods of lunacy. George III. was obstinate, to literal insanity, against the Irish Catholics; Pitt resigned, and the Irish lost their parliament without compensation, except in the case of the ever-fortunate Protestant minority. The lunatic survived for a generation, helpless, but none the less an insuperable obstacle in the path of Irish justice, which was inevitably shelved until the blessed release of King and country in 1820.

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Meantime, a champion had arisen in the Irish host. Daniel O'Connell survived as a powerful political force into the reign of Queen Victoria, and he is therefore an essential part of our immediate subject. He was one of the biggest of nineteenth century politicians, quite comparable with Gladstone, and a good deal like him; indeed, it is remarkable that the obvious similarity between the two men has not provoked more frequent comment. The tall and commanding presence, the keen and penetrating glance, the pleasing yet sonorous voice, the rich eloquence, equally powerful with small audiences and with great—all these are to be found in all the common descriptions of both. Both of them were Catholics, one on each side of the thin and wavering line which divides the Church of England at one end from the Church of Rome. Both spent the maturity of their powers in an unsuccessful struggle for the same political object. And when to this catalogue of common attributes is added, in the case of O'Connell, that insight into individual character which Gladstone so unfortunately lacked, and the skill of a practised lawyer

in the conduct of affairs, it becomes at least doubtful whether the advantage is not with the Irishman.

This, at all events, was the man who for more than a generation dictated the public opinion of Ireland. Those who insist upon the essentially unpolitical character of the Irish, and their incapacity for organised combination, have only to turn to the career of O'Connell (if, indeed, they need look so far into the past) for their refutation. Branded in England as an agitator, in Ireland he was, unmistakably, a general, and his troops were admirably marshalled. All his consummate skill was devoted to manœuvring the forces of Irish opposition, with the object first of securing emancipation for the Catholics from their disabilities, and then of repealing the Union. The Catholic Association was founded, and subjected to splendid discipline, with a financial position so strong that in the first year of its existence Catholic Ireland was contributing more than £2,000 per week in order to prove that she could afford neither to pay her rents nor to maintain an established church. The Catholic Association was suppressed by statute, and O'Connell drove his vaunted coach and six through the law of the land, with the result that under different names the association went on, and the Catholic rent continued to pour in. Ireland had already been brought to the pitch of enthusiastic unanimity when O'Connell played his master stroke by beating Vesey Fitzgerald in the Clare election, and confronting Wellington's government with the alternative of facing the compact ranks of Irish nationality or admitting the agitator, and with him a whole Irish party, to the benches of the English Commons. Wellington, in the Lords, yielded to the imminent danger of civil war: Peel, in the lower

house, frankly threw his party convictions overboard in consequence of an irresistible demand; and the first campaign of O'Connell had in ten years reached its triumphant conclusion. The doors of Parliament were at length opened to all British Catholics.

It would, however, have been untrue to English traditions if the concession had been made in any generous or large-hearted manner: and the customary qualifications and evasions were well in evidence from the beginning. In Ireland, as in England, the franchise was practically monopolised by the forty-shilling freeholder. It was the forty-shilling freeholders who had imposed upon Ireland her Protestant parliament, and upheld the oppression of that parliament throughout the eighteenth century. It was the same political factor which had been cajoled by O'Connell into turning against the tyranny of the landlord and hurling upon the Government the bombshell of the Clare election. These forty-shilling freeholders were now disfranchised, and Europe beheld the interesting spectacle of a United Kingdom almost simultaneously broadening the basis of political power in one country, and narrowing it in another. It was a grossly ungracious enactment, and it was a piece of stupid folly, since it was inevitably bound to cancel any feeling of gratitude which might have been felt in Ireland in consequence of the emancipation. The great concession which was to give voice to Catholic opinion was accompanied by a deliberate attempt to silence the majority of the Irish electors. Nor was this enough for English statesmanship in Ireland. The Emancipation Act was upon the statute-book, and all Catholics had a legal right to office. But legal right was all they obtained; and

instead of an attempt to make good the iniquities of the past, those iniquities were merely continued by the deliberate exclusion, in practice, of all Catholics, including O'Connell himself, from offices of influence. Emancipation remained for some time almost inoperative, in spite of the best opinion even in England, and Melbourne was left to lament that "what all the wise men promised has not happened, and what all the damned fools said would happen has come to pass."

This result was merely what any politician of sense ought to have foreseen: emancipation had been accompanied by the customary cheeseparing of the English in their dealings with Ireland, the Irish were left with yet another broken promise, or its equivalent, to avenge, and antipathy, instead of being lulled, was rapidly rising into active disgust. The first part of O'Connell's career had closed in nominal victory, but the real issue remained behind, and any chance that it might be permitted to slumber had been thrown away by blind English prejudice. No one was satisfied, and a renewal of the struggle on a broader basis was inevitable. O'Connell himself had no doubt of this from the first, and the second period of his life was initiated immediately with preparations on a grand scale for nothing less than Repeal.

In this new campaign O'Connell revived and extended the methods by which he had carried Ireland triumphantly with him towards emancipation. The Catholic Association with its "Rent" was re-established first as the "Anti-Union Association," and then, on its inevitable suppression, as the "Irish Volunteers for the Repeal of the Union." This was followed by a series of organised "public breakfasts," at which the leaders of Irish opinion

met to talk treason: again suppression came; but O'Connell merely changed the public breakfasts into private dinners, and the treason continued. A run was engineered on the Bank of Ireland, and the finances of the country lay at the mercy of the "Liberator": and in one year the number of crimes due to his influence reached a total of something like ten thousand.

This state of affairs O'Connell was resolved to continue until he had broken every government which failed to tackle the Irish problem by means other than unreasoning repression, and he countered the unpopularity engineered against him in this country with a lively and thoroughly obscene vituperation against the ministers, which brought him challenge after challenge. Physical courage, however, was not his strongest point, and he merely ignored most of the challenges or deputed them to some convenient relative (his son was inclined to be obliging in this respect), while he pushed on with politics. These included negotiations with some of the members of the Cabinet, whom he induced to promise him concessions in Ireland if he would call off the agitation: and when the ministers discovered that they had reckoned without their chief and that Grey was immovably against treating with rebels, O'Connell published the whole transaction and turned the government out of office.

This was in 1834, and for the next seven years (with two short intervals) Melbourne was Prime Minister. Nevertheless, he was master neither of his government nor of the people. O'Connell had put him in power, and he remained there only so long as O'Connell desired. With the Irish votes he held the balance of parties in the House of Commons, and Melbourne knew perfectly well that

his continuance in office depended on an obsequious complaisance towards his dictator in matters concerning Irish politics. Possibly this is all that ever existed of that "Lichfield House Compact," over which the historians have been squabbling for a century. Neither Melbourne nor O'Connell was the sort of man who would sign, seal and deliver a formal pact of agreement with the British nation as witness: but whether there was ever a deliberate compact or not, there were certainly terms which were clearly understood on both sides. Not for the last time in English politics, the Irish party was astride the beam, tilting the scales in whichever direction it chose. At the moment, that direction was Whig, partly owing to a genuine basis of political sympathy in the possession of a common Liberalism, but chiefly, no doubt, because Melbourne, who tiptoed through his tenure of power in a perpetual dread of waking some sleeping dog, had taken the precaution of inviting the Irish members to the meeting of his party before the session of 1835, and their not unwilling acceptance had committed them to some sort of co-operation. Thus it was that at the moment of Queen Victoria's accession Ireland was comparatively quiet; and with splendid irony the most fatal reign in Irish history was ushered in under a flag of truce; though long before the untutored girl had developed into the ageing and querulous widow, Ireland had sacrificed her lives by the million to the fatuity of her agrarian and political system.

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At first, however, the chief trouble, on the surface at any rate, was neither agrarian nor political. The third devil of Irish politics was in the ascendant at

the beginning of the reign—the devil of ecclesiastical affairs. Before the Queen had completed the first decade of her rule Ireland was well in the grasp of economic forces which kept her impotently quiet for the best part of a generation; but that was not until she had contrived to give the young Victorians a foretaste of her religious antipathies. In accordance with the general principle that no Irish problem is ever a straightforward affair, the problem of the Irish Church has exhibited throughout a twofold aspect. From one point of view the whole question turns upon finance: from another, it is primarily a matter of higher education. Finance came first, with Melbourne's attempt, at the very beginning of the reign, to do something to fulfil his part in the Lichfield House Compact. The essence of that compact was virtually this—that whatever the Melbourne government might attempt in the way of Irish relief, nothing was to be done thoroughly; and in this way Melbourne managed at the same time to realise his own procrastinating individuality and to shift an increasingly complicated Irish problem on to the shoulders of the next generation but one. Still, something he had to do, in order to keep the votes of O'Connell's followers, and there were glaring grievances ripe for reform in the religious sphere. Eighty per cent and more of the Irish were Catholics, most of them with no money to spare: yet one-tenth of the income of Catholic Ireland was confiscated by law for the maintenance of the Irish Established Church, which was Protestant like her sister in England. It was, however, an Irish Church, and it was therefore inconceivable that its Protestantism should be free from complications. Being established, it was, of course, an Anglican foundation, with the liturgy of the Church of

England ; whereas half the Protestants of Ireland were Presbyterians, with a general abhorrence of liturgies of any sort. In this way the genius of Irish affairs was conciliated, and Protestant and Catholic Ireland combined to support, with one-tenth of the produce of their united labour, a church which neither of them wanted and neither of them ever attended. The clergy of the established church in Ireland, finding themselves thus without congregations, left their roomy shrines to the care of underpaid curates, and spent their more than adequate incomes in England, much as the landlords did with their rents; while the Nonconformists in general, and the Roman Catholics in particular, crowded into barns or spread themselves over fields, to worship in the only way they could possibly find satisfactory.

That was the problem of Disraeli's "alien church": a wealthy clergy and still wealthier bishops battening in idleness upon the wages of the peasants, while the latter were compelled to depend for a precarious communion upon the impoverished efforts of an impecunious and persecuted church. And again, lest the issue should be too simple, there was the usual cross-connection with other Irish affairs—in this case with the land question. At the same time as the Catholic peasants were paying to Protestant landlords rents which they deemed exorbitant, they were compelled out of the residue of their casual finances to maintain the church which the landlords alone attended.

Melbourne therefore decided to shift the financial burden of the Irish Church on to the shoulders of the landlords, since it was they who not only possessed the money, but also monopolised the benefits of its communion. This was the object of the Tithes

Commutation Act of 1838, which provided that in future tithes should be paid by the landlords instead of by the tenants, and that the amount of the tithe should be reduced by a quarter, lest the anomalous spectacle should be witnessed of wealthy Protestants having to pay as much, now they were to maintain their own church, as the impoverished Catholics had paid when they maintained it for them.

By this measure, at any rate, a real grievance was removed; for although, in that age of flourishing economic theory, there were plenty of critics to denounce against the act the thoroughly sound economic doctrine that charges on rent are always and inevitably paid by the tenant, Ireland nevertheless defied Economics and accepted the terms of the concession exactly as they stood. There is no sort of evidence that tithes have since been paid, in more than a few districts, by anyone but the landlords ; and now, as often before and since, the rival creeds and classes among the Irish showed that, in spite of the frequent use of the weapons of criminal assault on the one side and legalised assault on the other, one factor which is entirely absent from no Irish situation is the irrepressible good nature of everybody on both sides.

Nevertheless, everybody on both sides remained dissatisfied. While the well-to-do landowners found themselves saddled with an additional charge upon their purses, Catholic Ireland remained conscious that a church which was essentially English was still supported by Irish money and Irish labour. In other words, there had been no " appropriation " of any of the redundant wealth of the established church of Ireland for the support of purposes more specifically Irish. At the same time, all parties were aware that the object of Melbourne and his Whigs

had been, not the welfare of the Irish peasant, but the retention of the Irish votes in the English House of Commons; while the principle of "appropriation" had been rejected over and over again by the English House of Lords, which was at this time far more representative of English political opinion than the representative chamber itself.

The next phase of the Irish Church problem is instructively illustrative of the high-principled consistency of the English nation in this matter of ecclesiastical finances. Appropriation had been rejected owing to the inherent sin involved in devoting the earnings of Irish Catholics to the support of a religion which they mistakenly believed to be the right one; and yet, seven years later, when Peel proposed to increase the government grant to the Catholic theological college at Maynooth, he was denounced by English Protestant opinion for the devilish suggestion that the English people should be asked to finance the promulgation of a creed which was not their own. The Nonconformists stormed and Gladstone resigned, while Peel was faced with the opposition of Protestants of all types from Bright to Macaulay. Nevertheless, his was a statesmanlike attempt to tackle the Irish University problem, and it did some good, although the importance of the whole affair was not in the least proportioned to the enormous pother which it created at the time, and which was almost entirely due to the personal importance of Peel's opponents, and especially to the hairsplitting resignation of the rising hope of the stern unbending Tories. Peel knew that the college of Maynooth had hitherto succeeded only in pumping an indifferent half-education into a priesthood which emerged from it, in consequence, only half-educated; and he

supposed that, with a trebled grant from the state, the college might produce better priests who were less hostile to the English connection. He proved eventually to have been half right and half wrong. The priesthood was improved, but it remained as hostile as ever to this country, and other solutions of the educational problem have been needed from time to time.

Peel counterbalanced his increased grant to Maynooth by the foundation of the celebrated "godless" colleges at Cork, Galway, and Belfast, in a misguided effort to provide for Catholic Ireland an efficient university education which should exclude religious topics. Naturally enough, the scheme failed, and while the Queen's College at Belfast flourished under Protestant auspices, the two colleges in Catholic areas were a complete fiasco, largely owing to a systematic boycott by the Irish priesthood, which founded its own Catholic University, with Newman himself at its head. This University, however, was maintained entirely by private subscriptions, and whereas the militant Protestantism of Trinity College, Dublin, and the halting non-religiosity of the "godless" colleges, were both supported with public money, Catholic Ireland had to provide for its own higher education. Before he died, Disraeli tried his ingenuity at the problem, with the result that in 1879 the Royal University of Ireland was founded, with a state-provided revenue, as a purely examining body, empowered to grant degrees to any student, wherever educated and in whatever religion, who cared to sit for its examinations. Still Catholic Ireland stood aloof, waiting for some part of the taxes it paid to be devoted to the provision of a Catholic culture. This problem, at any rate, Victorian

England failed to solve ; and it remains to be seen how far subsequent modifications are likely to prove successful in the long run.

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It is time, however, to return to the second aspect of the Irish Church problem as it confronted the Victorians. After the affair of Maynooth, Ireland was for many years too busy with more urgent considerations to worry unduly about the revenues of its churches; and when eventually the question was revived, it was revived not by the people of Ireland, but by the English Liberal party, and less as a matter of statesmanship as applied to Ireland, than as a move in the party game at Westminster. Gladstone, of course, was proudly conscious in 1868 of being influenced by no such motives, and at the end of his days he recalled this as one of the four occasions when he was dominated by what he called his "insight into the facts of particular eras, and their relation one to another, which generates in the mind a conviction that the materials exist for forming a public opinion and for directing it to a particular end." Gladstone's insight, however, had chosen carefully its moment for forming a public opinion on the iniquities of the Irish Church, which had been allowed to wallow undisturbed in its wickedness for over twenty years. Disraeli had just taken the wind out of the Liberal sails by appropriating parliamentary reform for the Conservative programme, and the Liberals were left gasping in astonishment to find their own project of a reformed franchise accomplished by the party of reaction. They were therefore compelled to cast about in a hurry for something upon which to oppose the Conservatives, and Gladstone's mind,

moving as usual in its mysterious way, discovered the urgency of the Irish Church question. Yet it is probable that he approved of something like disestablishment at the time of his resignation over the Maynooth grant twenty years previously : and it is certain that not many months before he launched disestablishment upon an unwilling Queen and an unwilling Parliament, he had declared quite definitely his belief that it was well outside the politics of the day.

In fact, notwithstanding the complacent reminiscences of his old age, it was not Gladstone who in the late 'sixties formed British opinion on the Irish question, but the Irish people themselves ; and not the Irish people in Ireland, but the Irish in America, whither millions of emigrants had flocked since the famines of the hungry 'forties, and where they had accumulated with consistent success the wealth which their native land had always failed to yield. That wealth they had devoted to a campaign, systematically organised, for convincing the public opinion of Europe and America that the Irish question was an immediate political issue. This was the object of the Fenian movement : not to conquer Canada, nor to blow up either the prisons of London or the policemen of Manchester, but to compel Great Britain, by the force of an insistent Western opinion, to realise its moral responsibility for Ireland ; and in that object it had succeeded. The Fenian movement hurled Irish affairs into the political arena, and there they have remained ever since.

Still, no reform is practical politics until some party has adopted it, and the immediate fruition of the Fenian designs was due, as we have seen, to the momentary need of the Liberal party for a

fresh platform. Luckily for the Liberals, the country was ready to support their new project. The Liberalism of the Middle Class, indeed, and particularly its Irish Liberalism, was still by no means irrepressible. The Middle Class had succeeded in ignoring Ireland for the best part of the thirty-five years which had elapsed since the Great Reform Act plunged it into political prominence, and it was prepared to ignore her indefinitely. The governing class of the early Victorian era was equally apathetic. But it was no longer the early Victorian era, and the control of English politics was no longer in the hands of the Middle Class and its appointed rulers. If by his recent Reform Act Disraeli had astutely compelled Gladstone to shift his Liberalism on to an Irish platform, he had by the same act ensured for his rival the unqualified support of the British House of Commons. Disraeli had sold Conservatism for a temporary party advantage, and the party itself suffered the consequences of the transaction in the shape of a summary expulsion from power. Gladstone initiated his Irish programme with characteristic vigour, and soon forced on the government a general election in which the Conservatives were decisively defeated. The bulk of the electors, the uneducated masters of the political situation, had freely exercised their newly-won franchise against the party at whose hands they had received it, and Gladstone found himself with a majority of far more than the usual Victorian dimensions.

It is a deeply significant fact that the first verdict of the enfranchised democracy of England was a verdict on Irish affairs, and that a verdict unmistakeably Liberal. Ireland could no longer complain, at all events, that England would show her no

sympathy. The sympathy of the English masses had been trumpeted from the housetops, and Ireland was for the present assured of the consideration at least of that preponderant portion of the British electorate which had itself experienced the evils of oligarchical oppression. The days of oligarchy in Great Britain were at last ended ; democratic England was resolved to make Ireland equally democratic, and had not yet learnt that the Irish people might prefer a democracy which was repugnant at once to English ideas and to English interests.

Thus Gladstone was in a position to disregard the combined wishes of the class which had dominated English politics since English politics began, and the class which had gladly acquiesced in that domination for the past thirty or forty years ; and all the fulminations of Conservatism were vain. The Conservative party as a whole declared its determination to stand by the Constitution in general and the Irish Church in particular. The bishops of that Church proved their willingness to save the Conservatives' Church at the expense of the Conservatives' Constitution, by encouraging the wealthier Irish to emigrate with their wealth, and bidding the rest to "trust in God and keep their powder dry"—spiritual powder, the bishops explained ; but the Irish people, they knew quite well, were better acquainted with the earthly sort. The House of Lords paraded its resolve to stifle the Liberal project at all costs : and even the Queen "deplored the necessity, under which he conceived himself to lie, of raising the question as he had done." Gladstone, however, was able to confront the combined reactionaries with a Liberal combination equally heterogeneous and far more effective.

Loyal Liberals who always did as they were told were joined by English Roman Catholics under a similar obligation ; by Irish Roman Catholics under no obligation save that of annoying the English ; by Tractarian Catholics within the Anglican communion, who grieved at the ostentatious Evangelicalism of the Irish Church ; and by more than Evangelical Nonconformists, who sought a general disestablishment wide enough to embrace the English Church as well as the Irish, and who brought with them the enormous moral influence of the name of Bright.

Between these forces the issue was joined, and the Conservatives (who had been lamentably busy during recent years in admitting error after error in their ways, and compelling the hardly less fortunate Liberals in sympathetic competition to do the same) began by acknowledging that the Irish Catholics had a financial grievance in their exclusion from the assistance of the national exchequer. They therefore proposed, in opposition to Gladstone's scheme for the complete disendowment of the Irish Church, a plan for what they variously called " Concurrent Endowment " or " Levelling Up," the essence of which was that instead of depriving the Irish Church of its revenue from endowment, it was better to endow the Catholic Church of Ireland as well as her Protestant sister. They adopted this scheme, of course, much as Gladstone had adopted disendowment and they themselves had previously adopted the democratic franchise, mainly through their need of some sort of an appeal to the people: but in their choice, as in their democratic departure in 1867, they were blest with their usual luck in gaining the approbation of posterity. Although " Concurrent Endowment " for the Irish Catholic

Church appealed to the Conservatives of the 'sixties merely as a useful—and not too useful—party cry, it has since been pretty generally recognised as immeasurably superior to the insufficiently constructive measure proposed by Gladstone.

The truth was, of course, that Gladstone had failed to perceive the real grievance of the Irish. No doubt there was moral reproach in official support of the Church of the minority, while the state ignored the Church of the majority : and no doubt the disendowment of the Anglican Communion in Ireland was calculated to remove that reproach. Disendowment, however, was not calculated to provide the Irish Catholics with a revenue for their church, and it was money they most sorely lacked. Concurrent endowment would have remedied this : and if it is true that concurrent endowment would have failed to redress the complaint of state favouritism for the Protestants, it is obvious on the other hand that disendowment failed to redress the grievance of financial strangulation. Concurrent endowment, in short, would have left the Irish Catholics with a grievance and a revenue, whereas disendowment actually left them with a grievance and no revenue, which in a thoroughly Irish fashion proved equivalent in practice to two grievances ; and to these, others were speedily added.

It was precisely this matter of revenue, however, which ensured the failure of concurrent endowment to recommend itself to the Liberal leader. Gladstone had made his reputation as Chancellor of the Exchequer, and he was undoubtedly an able financier. At any rate, the nation was better off for the rigid retrenchment which he had imposed upon it, and retrenchment was deeply embedded

in his political soul. His instinct for parsimony in the national finances simply reinforced the other arguments, equally weighty, which confirmed him in his repudiation of concurrent endowment as an alternative to disestablishment. To disestablishment he was bound by a triple chain. It was the official programme of his party as opposed to that of the Conservatives: it was cheaper than the proposals of the latter : not least, it was essentially his own plan, formulated and elaborated by himself: and Gladstone was in nothing more essentially Victorian than in his conviction of the excellence of his own opinions. And always in the background there lay that record majority of his in the House of Commons, swayed by its growing loyalty to himself.

It was easy to see that the Conservatives were fighting a losing battle. Nevertheless, they conducted their retreat in a masterly manner, and not even the Premier himself knew how far they were prepared to go in their resistance. The House of Lords, at any rate, had not been elected by manhood suffrage, and the House of Lords had a majority as pronouncedly Conservative as that of the Commons was Liberal. Led by Lord Cairns, with Disraeli, of course, always pulling the strings, they pushed the country nearer and nearer the edge of a first-class crisis, more exciting than any fight between the two Houses from 1832 to 1910, and nothing but the sound commonsense and political wisdom of the Queen saved the situation. Victoria had received the advice of the Ministers of the Crown, and that advice she was determined to accept—for reasons of her own, but in accordance with the best constitutional precedents. The last line of the Conservative defence was broken, and

the Irish Church lost at once the official pre-eminence and the official revenue which had combined to feed the wrath of the Catholics. After the last day of 1870 the Irish people were to be freed from the obligation of financing a Church against which their consciences revolted.

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It was not yet, however, the last day of 1870 : before that came Ireland was once more plunged into chaos as desperate as ever. The millstones of political destiny were grinding on with their customary relentlessness, and in the process they were grinding the Liberal party so exceedingly small that eventually it lost all cohesion and became irretrievably disunited. But that lay in the future, and the present contained worries enough for Gladstone. He had adopted Irish Church reform as a reply to the Conservative theft of the programme of democratic enfranchisement, and the country had acclaimed his choice with such enthusiasm that within eight months of the elections Irish Disestablishment was an accomplished fact. All this was very creditable to the Liberals, but an accomplished reform is entirely useless as a party cry. It is the inevitable misfortune of all Liberal leaders that every success they achieve, every promised reform which they accomplish, diminishes their capacity to serve their people further: after each step forward they are compelled to decide whether they will rest content with the position they have reached, or whether they will continue to push on ahead. In the former case, the country is pretty sure to prefer a Conservative government as more likely to be successful with a programme of rest and recuperation : and in the latter case, supporters are shed

with every increase in the radicalism of the reformers, until majority has dwindled into minority, and a Conservative government is returned to power.

This is the force behind the political pendulum —the principle which determines the action and reaction of political affairs. Gladstone's record majority was simply a tangible token that the country as a whole was with him in his proposed Irish reforms, and the country as a whole had helped him to carry those reforms to a successful issue. His mandate for Irish Disestablishment was unmistakably complete. But how far was he justified in regarding that mandate as applicable to Irish reforms in general? There lay his obvious dilemma. Either he could lay down his weapons in the proud consciousness of a mission fulfilled, or he could push on, always with the record majority behind him, to further innovations in Irish politics. Either choice was bound to lead in the long run to a return of the Conservatives to power. If, however, the second alternative were preferred, that return would be delayed for some time at any rate. Better office with a dwindling majority than no office at all, and there was no need for the metaphysical niceties of Gladstone's intellect in order to maintain that the decision of the electorate had applied to Irish affairs as a whole. Gladstone therefore simply widened his party programme and decided to proceed with an attack on other Irish grievances: and that decision involved him in a course of evolution in his political opinions which could not stop short of Home Rule itself: the inevitable sequel of 1870 was 1886.

Gladstone, however, was too busy with the metaphysical niceties to realise at the moment the

broader significance of the step he was taking, and at the same time the Irish people lacked the clarity of the English Liberal intellect in discerning the eternal wisdom of the benefits which English Liberalism had conferred upon them. The upshot was that Irish discontent, now that it had received a somewhat doubtful appeasement in one quarter, simply transferred itself to the nearest available grievance in another, and focussed itself upon the Land.

Here, at any rate, the Irish Question had got down to fundamental realities. That question had presented itself to different generations in many different guises, but there are few of its manifestations which cannot ultimately be traced to agrarian discontent. Political and even religious revolutions are almost invariably the work of an enthusiastic minority, which derives its motive power from the masses: and the masses are most frequently moved by economic considerations. So at least it was with Ireland. Whatever aspect of the Irish question has been chosen from time to time, by the leaders of the moment, as the dominant issue, the real strength of the Irish opposition has always sprung from the discontent of the Irish peasantry, who always are and always have been sublimely indifferent to Repeal and Federation and Disestablishment, but who sweat daily under the consciousness of agrarian grievances. Remove those grievances, and you take the heart out of the Irish question, at any rate as it presented itself to the Victorians.

For this reason it is always interesting to watch the political manœuvres of the Irish demagogues : they have always been thoroughly familiar with the details of the Irish Land Question, and they are always more likely than any other class of men

to find the solution of it. Solution, however, they have never ventured to offer, for they know that any solution of the agrarian problem would immediately involve the defeat of their own objects. The Irish demagogue, unlike the Irish peasant, has always been a politician, with the inevitable incapacity of the political mind for realising that politics are never more than a means to an end. With them the objective is Irish independence as an end in itself, whereas the rank and file of the Irish people seek only peace and comfort. If Home Rule is essential to peace and comfort, then every Irishman is a Home Ruler : but when the English connection brought with it, as in seasons of good harvests it regularly did, plenty and prosperity, then Irish demagogy found less fuel for its fires. The Irish people are out for an economic reality, and in periods of economic contentment the political fortunes of Home Rule flourish only under intensive applications of demagogic culture.

Hence Irish leaders throughout the nineteenth century, even when they have been proclaiming most loudly the wrongs of the Irish peasants, have always avoided any real redress of those wrongs, lest the Irish should be lulled by economic relief into a quiet life and a complete disregard for the purely political issues in Irish affairs. The political movement for Home Rule could only be fed on a diet of agrarian discontent, and for this reason all the efforts of Victorian England, which abhorred Home Rule, to allay that discontent, were deliberately thwarted by the machinations of Irish leaders who professed to be the guardians of Irish liberty both political and economic. In short, whether the Irish question be viewed from the standpoint of English or Irish politics, it is the land which matters

most : in one case, because it provides the problem to be solved, and in the other case because it provides a problem which at all costs must not be solved, lest the political question of Home Rule be shelved owing to the resultant satisfaction of the Irish peasantry.

If it is futile to pretend that the issues are simple, it is no less futile to encourage the over-refining subtleties with which Gladstone never failed to cloud them. Certain outstanding principles, at any rate, are clear. First and foremost is the origin of land tenure as Ireland understood it. Ireland has always been several centuries behind the civilisation of the rest of the United Kingdom, and in her economic development she was, until comparatively recent times, more backward even than that. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, however, the series of English conquests caused a definite break in the natural evolution of Irish agrarian society, with the result that upon the ruins of the original Irish land system there was erected an English land system which had evolved along entirely antagonistic lines. The land system of Victorian Ireland was the resultant of this unhappy combination. On the surface, landlord and tenant in Ireland based their relationships upon the same principles of law and custom as ruled in England : while beneath that surface there lurked the survival of an earlier Irish culture under which the land had been owned by all the Irishmen of each tribe in common. The confiscations of the earlier centuries had been confiscations from tribal chieftains, as a punishment for real or supposed treason. And whereas the recipient of the tribal lands had conceived himself to be entering into possession, in the English sense, of an estate on the English model, his

Irish tenants had invariably received him as the unwelcome successor of their deposed chieftain, with no more rights than the latter in the land which belonged equally to every man of them.

In short—if it is fair to summarise abruptly a conception of land tenure so alien to the social and juridical notions of the English—the Irish tenant of the nineteenth century regarded himself, in a manner too vague for written contract, but none the less real for all that, as part owner of the soil for which he paid a rent. That part ownership had, in his eyes, been confirmed and amplified by the successive improvements which he and his fathers had effected upon their lands ; and whereas the landlords, English for the most part and entirely incapable of understanding this apparent legal quibble of "tenant-right," were inclined to regard improvements in holdings as good enough excuse for raising the rent, the tenant maintained that these same improvements were merely an additional reason for lowering it. It was this indeterminate "tenant-right" which lay at the root of the Victorian Irish problem ; and the difficulty was stated clearly enough by the Bessborough Commission in 1880 :—

> "There has in general survived to the Irish farmer, through all vicissitudes, in despite of the seeming or real veto of the law, in apparent defiance of political economy, a living tradition of possessory rights, such as belong, in the more primitive ages of society, to the status of the man who tilled the soil."

That conclusion, however, was reached by the Victorians only after half a century's struggle with the Irish Land problem. Even then, the note of pained surprise at the apparent flouting of law and

economics was thoroughly characteristic of an age which had not learnt to question the infallibility of legal and economic principles. Law, after all, is only codified custom, and it ought to have been easy enough for the Victorians to realise that they were up against a type of custom which had never been codified. They made the same mistake with regard to economics : they had invented the economic man and sanctified economic laws ; and they regarded the latter, not, like their legal counterparts, simply as convenient generalisations from the available data, but as possessing an axiomatic truth in themselves, with which any apparent exception had to be reconciled.

Ireland, however, had had enough of English economics. It was the age of Bright and Cobden, and still more of the rest of their class—the successful manufacturing type without the redeeming qualities of Bright and Cobden themselves. *Laissez-faire* was the order of the day, and the invention of steamships and the Encumbered Estates Acts had combined, about the middle of the century, to foist upon Irish tenants a class of landlords who saw less of Ireland even than their predecessors of the landed gentry, and who lacked the sympathy of the latter with their tenants, based as it was upon the long connection of ancient families with the soil. These new landlords had made good in English business, largely by the application of pure economic theory to conditions in which the law of increasing returns was well in evidence : and they now came over (occasionally) to Ireland, to apply the same maxims, matured as they were in English towns and in exceptionally favourable conditions, to the sterile soil and alien customs of the Irish peasantry. They carried out

on their Irish estates the principle of *laissez-faire* with the energetic and punctilious nonchalance which had won their English fortunes. Tenants who had known kindly landlords, not unwilling to share with themselves something of the poverty of the countryside, found themselves classed together as an abstract generalisation called Labour, unable to obtain access to the fleeting abstraction of Capital which had become entitled to their rents.

The new landlord, moreover, was determined in the fulness of his economic pride to make the most of the "differential advantages" which went to swell his rent : and in the later nineteenth century the differential advantages were overwhelmingly on his side. The Irish tenant was by no means an embodiment of the economic man, and he rarely obeyed the facile generalisations which the complacency of the Victorian middle class presumed to dignify by the name of economic laws. The peasants were poor, and famine after famine had made them poorer. Nevertheless, "in apparent defiance of political economy," instead of diminishing in numbers until rents decreased and the yield of the soil per head increased in such a way as to fix them at an economic standard of living, the Irish peasants increased and multiplied exceedingly, and even then were foolish enough to be fair (instead of economic) with their children, by subdividing their holdings, generation after generation, until farms had dwindled into cottages and cottages into allotments ; with the final result that population outstripped the means of subsistence, rents were forced upwards by competition, and owing to the prevailing insecurity of tenure, improvement was generally ignored and harvests diminished instead of increasing : while landlords looked on, secure in their belief in the

gospel of *laissez-faire,* worshipping only the divinity of Ricardo, and heedless of the devilry of Malthus behind their backs.

All this was the result of well-intentioned legislation in the interests of those Irish landlords who found themselves caught, after the deadly famines of the 'forties, in a financial embarrassment more or less temporary: English efforts to remove a passing difficulty had merely introduced further difficulties more lasting and more acute. The Encumbered Estates Acts were a mistaken and uncharacteristic interference with the sacred laws of economics, and they loaded Ireland with a class of landowners who took care for the rest of the century that the laws of economics should avenge themselves unhindered. The fundamental poverty of Ireland therefore remained, and some relief was imperatively necessary.

As early as 1845 the Devon Commission had subjected the whole problem to a thorough investigation, but the Devon Commission was composed entirely of landlords, and it was hardly likely that they would face the painful necessity of acknowledging some degree at any rate of tenant-right. This was the cardinal factor, and this the commissioners ignored. Their only really effective recommendation was that the State should assist emigration on an extensive scale, and this policy of seeking prosperity by depopulation was followed with such effect that within a generation there were more Irish workers and more Irish wealth in America than anywhere else: and a very large proportion of the wealth found its way back, before long, into the purses of Irish political agitators, so that the Irish problem was further complicated, in the first place because many of the best type of Irishmen had felt themselves driven from

their country, and in the second place because the Irish people were now conscious of a financial backing with which they had hitherto been unfamiliar. All this had the inevitable reaction in transferring Irish discontent from an agrarian to a political plane: and the process is well summarised in that offer by an Irish-American supporter which Parnell never tired of repeating: "Here are twenty-five dollars—five for bread and twenty for lead."

It was this acquisition by the Irish people of a political fund which definitely shifted the Irish question on to a political platform. And once again the Nemesis of Irish History took care that before anything like a solution had been found for the problem of the Irish land, that problem had given way in importance to the problem of the Irish Legislature. Victorian legislation upon Irish agrarian affairs was a constant but impracticable attempt to reach a receding goal. For that reason the details of the various laws which were passed are of less importance than they appeared to contemporaries, or than they are made to appear in most of the histories of the time, since many of their provisions were so hopelessly inadequate that they lapsed or were repealed almost immediately. All that is necessary, therefore, is to follow out the development of certain cardinal principles.

The political opinion of the Mid-Victorians is supported by the verdict of two subsequent generations in regarding Gladstone's Land Act of 1870 as the great landmark in Irish remedial legislation. And in this, contemporary and later opinion have both been right. It is true that although Gladstone at the time declared the absolute finality of its provisions, they were torn to pieces by their author the next time he was prime minister. It is true that the

best part of the Act—those clauses which attempted to facilitate land-purchase by the peasants—remained almost entirely inoperative. It is true that these and the remaining clauses of the act were hopelessly clogged by the eternal pettifogging precisions of a premier more brilliant than wise, and more academic than either. All these things and more are entirely true of this largely abortive measure, and yet it remains indisputably great. For Gladstone, who so seldom managed to rise above the details of procedure into the expanses of constructive statesmanship, had in this act embodied a vital principle, which completely reversed the previous attitude of the English to Irish economic questions. In other words, Gladstone had committed himself to a recognition of Irish Tenant Right, and no future Irish Land Act was able to ignore it. The principle, once adopted, was so obviously and inevitably just that it ceased at once to be the exclusive property of any one party, although both Liberals and Conservatives continued to regard it as a transitory rather than a permanent condition. In accordance with this mistaken idea Gladstone and his party encouraged the tenants to sign away their rights, while the Conservatives sought gradually to eliminate the landlords and substitute a universal class of peasant proprietors. Both classes therefore retained their grievances, and the Irish problem was no nearer solution than ever.

It is worth while at this point to follow out the patchwork devices adopted by both parties during the rest of the reign in order to reduce the existing legislation to working order. The Act of 1870, intended by Gladstone as his final settlement of the land question, was in fact never more than the tentative expression of a first principle. It failed most

signally to pacify Ireland, where Coercion Acts had to be applied with even greater frequency than before, and which was already passing, under the influence of the importation of American gold and American political ideas, into the Home Rule stage of its controversy with England. This transition was facilitated by the series of good harvests in the middle 'seventies, which drew off the attention of the Irish from their purely economic grievances and gave time for the Home Rulers to formulate and popularise their demands. Then, at the end of the decade, the crops once more failed, and in a final recrudescence of agrarian discontent the Land League was born, with the immediate and ostensible objects of reducing rack-rents and encouraging the development of peasant proprietorship, but with the ultimate intention, openly avowed everywhere west of Land's End, of chasing from Ireland the prevailing system of landownership, and everything else which bore the stamp of England. In 1878 there were 301 convictions in Ireland for agrarian crime: in one year that number was almost trebled, and in two years more it had increased fifteenfold to about 5,000. By that time Gladstone was once again in power, and he had the sense to realise the absurdity of maintaining the conservative position which he had adopted ten years before, especially as the Conservative party was already showing signs of further willingness to cut the ground from under the feet of its opponents by adopting, in Ireland as it had done in England, a policy more liberal than that of the professed Liberals.

Hence the Land Act of 1881, which, though it still bore the marks of its author's temperament in an unwieldy subtility and a survival of the desire ultimately to assimilate the Irish land system to that

recognised by the existing English law, did nevertheless carry the matter one step further; the "Three F's," which had made such stir in the politics of the day—they were Fixity of Tenure, Freedom of Sale, and Fair Rents—were frankly adopted, and machinery was established, in the shape of a Land Court of Arbitration, to cope with the difficulties involved in assessing rents at a figure admittedly fair. This court knew its duty: the government wished to conciliate the Irish, and the court took care to do it; and an almost confessed rivalry was witnessed between the official court of the government and the unofficial tribunals of the Land League, each of which outvied the other in fixing rents at a figure low enough to placate the peasantry. Naturally enough, the landlords were exasperated, and they received a good deal of sympathy in England; and since then the increasing contentment of Irish tenants has to be discounted by the increasing dissatisfaction of Irish landlords. One other defect of the act of 1881 was tackled with much success by the Conservatives. The Liberals had encouraged the peasants to buy up their holdings, but the peasants were too poor and the Liberal policy fell through. In 1885, however, the Conservative enactment best known as the Ashbourne Act established the principle that the purchase money should be loaned to the tenants by the State at a rate which made the interest payable lower than the existing rent. This obviously was encouragement of a concrete kind, and the same principle has been steadily widened by subsequent legislation. Within two years of the Queen's death the Irish Land Question appeared to be well in hand.

. . . . . .

More than twenty years, however, before the Queen's death, the Irish Land Question had given way as the prominent issue to the question of Home Rule. Gladstone was driven from pillar to post in his treatment of the Irish Question, owing to his own abiding conceit in the ultimate perfection of his measures of relief. The Church had been disestablished, to Gladstone's satisfaction, and the Liberals therefore adopted the land as their revised party cry: the Land Act of 1870 was declared by their leader to be his last word, and the party moved on to University reform: their Irish Education Bill of 1873 was defeated in the Lords, and merely anticipated their definite fall from power: and, on their return after six years of exclusion, they were doomed, whether they knew it or not, to take up an attitude in Irish politics more radical than the by no means reactionary attitude of the Conservatives: and that spelt nothing less than Home Rule, although it took five or six years for the fact to penetrate the barrage of intellectual niceties which protected the inner recesses of Gladstone's mind. The Liberals were being driven on the surge of an irresistible flood to a position where they were to be left by the ebb of the tide high and dry above the chance of office for some time after the end of the reign.

In the meantime, they were to have their innings, and Home Rule—the repeal, complete or partial, of the Union of 1800—became the programme of the dominant party, instead of the war cry of fanatical extremists. The extremists, however, had prepared the way, and they were themselves preceded by O'Connell with his statesmanlike grasp of the whole problem. O'Connell, as we have seen, had realised at the end of his days that Repeal, the second great

object of his career, was unattainable; and following out the maxim (which he had assiduously applied throughout to the safety of his own person) that "no political amelioration is worth one drop of human blood," and that "one living patriot is worth a whole churchyard full of dead ones," he had studied moderation in all things: he declared himself contented with federation, as distinct from repeal, as an initial compromise—"I am always for taking an instalment when I cannot get the whole . . . . a Parliament inferior to the English Parliament I would accept as an instalment, if I found the people ready to go with me." The people were ready to go with O'Connell everywhere; and while he lived monster meetings were held in perfect order, and even cancelled successfully at a moment's notice; crime was kept down to a level astounding in a period of famine; and the voice of the Irish people was uttered by constitutional means through constitutional channels, in definite alliance with one of the great English parties.

For all these things O'Connell was despised by his own left wing as heartily as he despised the extremists in return: and when, in the year following O'Connell's death, all Europe went mad in a series of revolutions, every one of which was ultimately unsuccessful, Ireland caught the general insanity under the leadership of one of the most foolish of the many foolish leaders who have fallen to her lot. During O'Connell's later years, Smith O'Brien had been the second man in the Irish ranks: after O'Connell's death he was indisputably the first, and he put himself at the head of that Young Ireland Movement which was being conducted by the very able leaders of the Irish extremists.

There was very much in the Young Ireland Move-

ment which was good: good journalism—journalism indeed of an exceedingly high level, especially in *The Nation,* under the editorship of Duffy; a real regard for the history and nationality of the Irish; a fervent and genuine patriotism. Nevertheless, the movement was condemned from the start. It was conducted at first by men who were learned in the schools and full of natural ability, but who lacked experience in affairs: and when their leadership fell to a man of experience, he was found to be one who had passed through that experience without assimilating its lessons. O'Brien merely led them from one foolishness to another. Predisposed, like the rest of the Young Irelanders, to over-emphasise the merely antiquarian aspect of Irish nationalism, and to ignore the hard and crooked measures of practical politics, he built their hopes of success upon an ideal: and idealists are cheap in Ireland. Convinced, in opposition to the deeper wisdom of O'Connell, that Repeal was " more easily attainable, and more useful when attained, than any federal constitution which could be devised," he led off with a picturesque oath not to touch alcohol until Repeal was accomplished—and the comic genius which presided over his affairs gave him twenty years in which to fulfil the vow: he denounced O'Connell's alliance with the Liberals—the only sort of method whereby anything has ever been done for Ireland: he maintained the necessity for avoiding civil war until within a few weeks of plunging into hostilities with a ludicrous lack of preparation, and in total disregard of the priests, who warned him that the people were wholly unready to fight: he issued to the rustic rabble which he called his army a manifesto that they were to procure, and presumably consume in their leisure moments, their own rations, as no

official commissariat could be organised: finally, he and his troops were ignominiously bundled out of the historic cabbage patch of the widow MacCormick by forty-six policemen, without a casualty on either side: and even his earnest plea that he should be gloriously executed for treason was disregarded by the Government, and he was packed off into a comfortable exile. So ended the Young Ireland Movement, and Repeal slept for twenty years, until it was aroused once more by the Fenians.

The Fenian artillery created more noise than damage, and Fenianism was never a real political force on this side of the Atlantic. Nevertheless, its indirect influence was almost incalculable: it performed for the cause of Home Rule the same service as was performed for Women's Suffrage by the Suffragettes: and if Suffragettes and Fenians made themselves appear equally ridiculous, both managed in the long run to awaken public opinion, and thus to provide the necessary basis for concrete reform. And Fenianism did one thing more than this: it converted to Home Rule a force even more potent than English public opinion—a force which in its turn converted Gladstone and the Liberal party to the same cause, rolled Parliament and Party for fifteen years and more in the mire of European ridicule, and compelled the English people to tackle the whole issue in a definite manner. That force was Parnell, and the history of the Irish Question for the last thirty years of the reign can be told as a biography of this one man.

The merely personal details of Parnell's career are too well-known to need recapitulation, and those in particular which are connected with the O'Shea divorce have been repeated *ad nauseam*. We are

here concerned merely with his political significance, and that in itself is interesting enough. His hold upon the people of Ireland, a hold as firm as that of O'Connell himself, was, like it, based upon outstanding personality: and yet he was as unlike O'Connell as he well could be. He was a Protestant: he was cold, apparently passionless, and reserved: he was no orator, though by no means an incapable speaker: and if his party was as loyal to him as it had previously been to O'Connell, that loyalty was nourished not upon affectionate regard for himself, but upon something like fear for the rigours of his discipline. Nevertheless, his career and achievements bear a remarkable similarity to those of his predecessor. He had the mass of the Irish people astonishingly under his control, and it was possible for a Liberal Government to make with him the Kilmainham Treaty—as a Whig Government had made the Lichfield House Compact with O'Connell—for the regulation of Irish crime in return for parliamentary concessions to Irish interests. Like O'Connell, too, he relied mainly upon constitutional means for effecting his ends, and his own most important work was done at Westminster.

In this connection, however, there is one striking distinction: with the party of physical force O'Connell had had no dealings, and his attitude was mainly one of detached contempt. But since the 'forties Fenianism had financed the fanatics, and the Fenians were not made of the stuff of Smith O'Brien. Physical force might be made a useful factor; Parnell was never the man to ignore useful factors. For this reason he worked hand in glove with the Fenian organisation, and although it is doubtful whether he himself was ever convicted of uttering, outside America, a single word of unequivocal

treason, there is no doubt whatever that treason and traitors were his constant tools, and that he used them with great effect. On this he was himself sufficiently explicit:

> "A true revolutionary movement in Ireland," he once said, "should, in my opinion, partake both of a constitutional and illegal character. It should be both an open and a secret organisation, using the constitution for its own purposes, but also taking advantage of its secret combination."

This was frank, but it was in accordance with the shrewd cynicism with which he stripped every problem of its non-essentials, and it was uttered with the Atlantic between him and arrest.

It is, moreover, a pretty complete exposition of his tactics. Those tactics included both an avowed abuse of constitutional methods for the frustration of constitutional government, and an officially-denied encouragement of semi-secret and undoubtedly traitorous societies, with their treasonable activities and no less treasonable funds, the latter of which Parnell admitted to be divided between bread and lead in the proportion with which we have already become acquainted. Parnell had been converted by the Fenian "martyrdoms" of 1867, and from that time onwards he worked with the Fenians for ends ultimately and even mediately the same, although he was never a member of the Fenian society. Similarly, when the Land League was founded in 1879 by Davitt, himself a Fenian, Parnell immediately became its real and acknowledged, though unofficial leader, and the wave of agrarian crime in Ireland ebbed and flowed for several years thereafter mainly at his command.

In one crime, the most famous of all, he has been formally acquitted of having had any share—and

indeed there was no need either to refute the *Times* articles on *Parnellism and Crime,* or to prepare the report of a Royal Commission on the same subject, in order to prove that Parnell had no hand in the murders in Phœnix Park. Parnell was incapable of permitting a comparatively popular Chief Secretary to be stabbed by accident: and the murder was in its effects so inevitably detrimental to the Irish cause, that even Parnell's private offer to Gladstone to quit Parliament for ever was an unnecessary proof of the sincerity of his condemnation. This culmination of Irish outrage completely stultified the "Kilmainham Treaty," which had only just been concluded, and that with grave risk to the effectiveness of Parnell's control over the extremists. It therefore nullified those constitutional endeavours with which Parnell was primarily concerned, and it so completely alienated English public opinion that the murder may be held largely responsible for the subsequent failure to obtain any form of Home Rule whatever during the remainder of the reign. In addition to this, although Parnell's denunciation of this particular crime was undoubtedly sincere, there nevertheless lurked beneath his general policy a vague incitement to murder, if not to the murder of secretaries of state; and in so far as Phœnix Park was the logical outcome of his own principles, it was bound to react unfavourably upon his influence, which was already sufficiently weakened by the unveiled cynicism with which he shocked the delicacy of the Mid-Victorians in his treatment of Mid-Victorian morals.

The Phœnix Park murders, however, like a good many other events in recent Irish history, have attracted more than their share of attention. They are, in a sense, one of Parnell's two great misfort-

unes, and they have helped to conceal the important fact that in dealing with open crime of any sort Parnell was rarely more than the detached administrator of a policy, and that the essential inspiration of his genius lay in turning constitutional means to extremely unconstitutional ends, both in England and in Ireland.

In Ireland, it is true, the constitutional and the criminal faded imperceptibly into one another, and it is always difficult to determine where the work of Parnell ended and that of the Land League began. Nevertheless, Parnell always kept himself well on the windy side of the law, and his two chief expedients, however much they might annoy the legal authorities, were not in practice actionable. In the first place, he supplemented the activities of the Land League with that " Plan of Campaign " which consisted in inciting the peasants to refuse payment of rents which they considered extortionate. Non-payment of rent, of course, frequently involved eviction, and the law was satisfied. Parnell's scheme, however, went further than this, and attempted, in several counties with marked success, to prevent the empty holdings from finding any tenants to take them up: with the result that landlords who refused " fair rents," arbitrarily assessed by their own tenants, found themselves with no rent at all, while the money they had declined to accept went to swell the exchequer of the movement against their class.

In order to stifle any incipient demand, on the part of the land-hungry population, for the holdings which thus lay unoccupied, Parnell devised the Boycotting campaign, the nature of which he himself clearly outlined to the people of Ennis:

" When a man takes a farm from which another

has been evicted, you must shun him on the roadside when you meet him, you must shun him in the streets of the town, you must shun him at the shop counter, you must shun him in the fair and in the market place, and even in the house of worship; by leaving him severely alone, by putting him into a moral Coventry, by isolating him from the rest of his kind as if he was a leper of old, you must show him your detestation of the crime he has committed."

This systematic Boycott was, indeed, never universally operative, but in many districts it was exceedingly efficient, and in none entirely a failure: while for those who came under its condemnation—and for the most part they were of the peasant class—it was at best a thorough nuisance, and at worst an intolerable persecution.

No more explanation is needed of the enormous wave of agrarian crime in Ireland which followed this whole campaign. In two or three years Parnell and the Land League, like the Fenians before them, had created a live public opinion, and Parnell therefore transferred his main activities to Westminster, where his greatest victories were to be won. The English people were already aware of the gravity of the Irish situation, and the English Parliament, and particularly the English Prime Minister, were now to learn that Ireland demanded the first place in the counsels of the Empire. Parnell, in short, set himself the two-fold task of forcing Parliament to discuss Irish affairs or nothing else, and of forcing Gladstone and the Liberals to adopt his own view of the Irish cause.

For this purpose he developed and systematised in the House of Commons that policy of "obstruction" which, invented by the Conservatives of the

'sixties in order to preserve the Constitution from the inrush of democracy, was henceforth to be used to prevent an important element of the constitution from functioning at all. All the garrulity of the most garrulous of Irish Members of Parliament was marshalled in order to prevent the House from reaching any decision about anything. In this, as usual, Parnell held himself aloof from the most obviously obnoxious activities of his followers, and his own speeches were generally pithy and pertinent enough: but there were plenty of Nationalists only too willing to make the most of this unparalleled opportunity of keeping away from the point under discussion. Parnell had declared war on the Commons: "if they don't do what we want, they shall do nothing else;" debates were protracted in strict accordance with the rules of the House, for twenty, twenty-six, and in one case forty-one hours, before the motion could be put; and the *Encyclopædia Britannica,* in a refreshing lapse into popular journalism, has calculated that during a single session the Speaker must have spent at least one hundred and fifty hours in attempts to reduce the Irish to order. This, of course, simply made Parliament ridiculous, and the dignity of Parliament was the touchiest spot of Victorian politics. The rules of the House of Commons were therefore revised, but the world had realised that not even respect for the proudest legislature in existence could hold the Irish from the proclamation of their grievances. Once again, the apparently wrong-headed energies of Irishmen had ripened public opinion, and Parnell shifted his ground accordingly. Henceforth he attacked the two parties in detail, instead of the House as a whole.

Circumstances were all in his favour at the end

of 1885. Foreign policy had done a good deal to undermine the general popularity of Gladstone, and in Parliament there were signs of restiveness at both ends of the Liberal party: on the one hand the old Whigs, under Hartington, distrusted the Premier's loyalty to the Union—and their distrust was justified, though Gladstone himself was not aware of the fact: at the other extreme Chamberlain and his Radicals suspected a leader, who had been a Tory, of a conservatism at least whiggish in purely domestic affairs: while in regard to Ireland, Chamberlain knew, even before Gladstone told him, the folly of a young politician's rushing blindly into any untried policy which might be adopted, as Randolph Churchill said, by "an old man in a hurry," merely to meet immediate emergencies. Nevertheless Gladstone was being rapidly forced on in the direction of Home Rule, against his will, and at first without his knowledge. At the end of the year his government was defeated, and Salisbury countenanced overtures on the part of Carnarvon, his Lord Lieutenant, to the Irish leader.

Parnell, at any rate, received the impression that the Conservatives were ready, for value received—and the leader of a large Nationalist party always had value to give—to include Home Rule in their party platform. Gladstone was in a hopeless dilemma. Over and over again he had repeated his conviction that Home Rule was impossible, unworkable, or at the very least outside the range of practical politics in his own lifetime: and all the Conservatism of a man nearer eighty than seventy went to reinforce this attitude. Still, however aged, he was supremely energetic, and he was the leader of a party which was faced for the second time in its recent history with the possibility of being fore-

stalled in Liberal legislation by its Conservative opponents. If the fiasco of 1867 was not to be repeated, Gladstone was bound to anticipate this threatened alliance of the Conservatives with Parnell; yet he knew that any positive declaration on his part in favour of a repeal of the Union would inevitably involve the secession from the Liberal party of the powerful Whig contingent of Hartington. He therefore desperately counselled silence in all quarters: "My earnest recommendation to everybody," he wrote to the Cabinet, "is not to commit himself. Upon this rule, under whatever pressure, I shall act as long as I can": and at least he had the consolation that Salisbury was doing the same thing at the same time with equal desperation.

The country, however, knew Gladstone better than he knew himself, and while his mind was busy with its customary convolutions, public opinion accepted the decidedly indiscreet statement inspired by his son that Home Rule had won the day in the Liberal counsels. It had: Gladstone himself soon realised it: and there is no need to read his book about his conversion in order to appreciate the motives behind it. One forlorn and unsuccessful attempt he made to retain control of his own destiny. At the General Election of 1885, the Liberals were returned to power, but not, as Gladstone had begged the constituencies, with a majority independent of Irish support; the final figures left him with eighty-six more supporters in the house than the Conservatives had secured: the Nationalists also numbered exactly eighty-six: so that the choice between Home Rule and the maintenance of existing conditions in Ireland was possibly also a choice between a majority of a hundred and seventy-two and no majority at all. He chose Home Rule, but he chose

it so thoroughly that it was impossible for either Hartington or Chamberlain to support him; and the Gladstonian Liberals were left in a minority after all. The Home Rule Bill of 1886 was defeated, the Liberal party was broken, and the Gladstonians, with their scratch policy of Home Rule, were banished from practical politics for twenty years, with the exception of a brief spell in the early 'nineties.

In other words, with his successful conversion of Gladstone, the effective achievement of Parnell was really accomplished, and for the next quarter of a century the Irish Question is really nothing more than an epilogue of defeated aims and hopes in abeyance. The force behind Gladstone Parnell failed to convert, and the new Parliament of 1886, elected with direct reference to Home Rule, contained a solid majority against it. Throughout this period Gladstone seems to have been constantly comparing the Liberal burden of Home Rule to Sisyphus and his stone: and he had every reason to realise that the political force of gravity which frustrated his efforts was the firm resolve of the English constituencies to maintain the Union until they were convinced of the advisability of repealing it.

The English constituencies, in fact, were not far wrong in their treatment of both the Home Rule Bills as mere improvisations, brilliant indeed, but more like academic exercises than the productions of a mature statecraft. Public opinion on the Irish Question was yet unformed, except in Ireland, for the simple reason that the leading statesmen of Great Britain had never presented the issues to their constituents, nor indeed considered those issues themselves, apart from the beclouding irrelevancies of English party manœuvres. Moreover, when the

most sincere and best informed of the politicians were doubtful about even the major factors, how was Gladstone—the "old man in a hurry"—to solve such difficulties in the face of a lifetime's prejudices? There were fundamental problems on the political side alone which still, perhaps, remain unsolved. In the first place, can a people capable of committing ten thousand crimes in a single year, be regarded as capable of self-government at all? And if they are, what share are they to assume both of the financial burdens of government in a style more civilised than themselves, and of the purely legislative functions of that government?

It was with regard to the last of these issues that Gladstone brought down upon himself the greatest ridicule, though none of his opponents had anything better to propose. By the earlier bill the Irish were to receive no representation at all at Westminster, so that if Ireland was to share in the cost of imperial defence, violence would be done to that essential canon of just government for which the American colonies had revolted, with the support of the greatest living English statesman, a century before. By the bill of 1893, Irish members were to be retained in both houses of the Imperial Parliament, but only for the discussion of purely Irish affairs. This would have meant that whenever—as in the Parliament then in existence—the Irish vote held the balance between the two English parties, there would be no chance of a stable majority one way or the other — and the working of the English constitution is based on the existence of a stable majority. This "in-and-out" clause was therefore withdrawn, and instead the Irish were to be permitted to vote on all matters at Westminster, at the same time as other Irish Members of another Parlia-

ment retained over the affairs of their own country a control which was unfettered by English interference. In other words, Ireland was to be given an influence in the domestic concerns of England which England was forbidden to exercise in those of Ireland. The anomaly was complete, and not even Gladstone believed that the English would tolerate it. For this reason the Home Rule Bill of 1893 was condemned by a majority of non-Irish members in the House of Commons: and the very decided rejection of the Bill by the Lords was a true reflection of the views of the English and Scottish electorate.

The Irish electorate, of course, was still solid for Home Rule. All electorates, however, are dependent upon their elected representatives, and by this time the Irish party was hopelessly ineffective. The events which led to this consummation have earned, both then and since, all the unwholesome notoriety which usually attends the private immoralities of the great, and they need only the briefest recapitulation. After the Conservatives, on the strength of a majority of over a hundred against Home Rule, had cast behind them the electioneering devil which had tempted them to adopt it, Parnell fell back again on the Liberal alliance, and there was no reason why in due course this combination should not have converted public opinion, and thus hastened by a generation the achievement of legislative independence for Ireland. Parnell, however, though no Victorian himself, was subject to Victorian morality, and he committed the unpardonable sin of being detected in an intrigue with another man's wife. For nearly ten years the Victorians had acquiesced in the concealment of the whole affair, but once it reached the publicity of the divorce court their fundamental righteousness asserted itself. The

Nonconformists, who were the mainstay of the Liberal party, and the Catholics, who were Home Rulers almost to a man, united in condemnation of the co-respondent. Gladstone was, therefore, compelled in self-interest to thrown him over, and the Nationalist leaders were in a quandary. There ensued one of those dissensions on a personal issue which are always inevitable if friends are to remain true to their loyalties, but which are none the less injurious for that to the cause which the divergent sections have equally at heart. The Nationalist ranks were irretrievably split. One-third of the party stood by Parnell: the remainder, realising that without Gladstone the Nationalists could do nothing, appointed a fresh leader. The quarrel survived the premature death of Parnell in the following year, and thus for his second Home Rule Bill Gladstone lacked the support both of the consummate tactics of Parnell himself and of a united Irish party. For the rest of the reign, and for a decade beyond it, the Irish Question was dead, only to be seriously revived when a great English party became once more dependent for its majority upon the votes of the Irish members of the House of Commons.

V. Victorian Imperialism

"Empire is congenial enough to the Englishman's temperament, but it is repugnant to his political conscience" (*George Unwin*, Studies in Economic History).

Of all the political legacies bequeathed by the Victorians, Imperialism is the one which their heirs have decided to value most. From the point of view of the legatees, this is easy enough to understand. Ground values and economic theories have changed since our grandfathers owned the estate, and property which they regarded as a dead weight upon their revenues has already for many years been yielding an exceedingly gratifying dividend. The old folks, unfortunately for themselves, cherished a conviction that trade follows the flag: and when, after long years of weary waiting, they were forced to the conclusion that the Empire was little better than a bad debt, they cast hurriedly about for the most respectable method by which they might write it off and have done with it. Nowadays, the converse of that threadworn maxim has become so commonplace that it found its way into the history-books before the newspapers decided to adopt it—partly because it is too obvious for the professional historian to miss, and partly because it is too patently immoral for the journalists to serve up to their readers undisguised.

And yet even the historians might have realised it a little earlier. The East India Company, which is ancient enough and dead enough to attract their concentrated attention, was founded a century and a half before we owned any territory worth mentioning in the East Indies; Australia remained little more than a geographical curiosity until we discovered that there was money in it; Canada was

an undeveloped consolation prize which we retained largely on the sentimental ground that its conqueror regarded it as less valuable than Gray's *Elegy;* and South Africa we had acquired almost accidentally by beating the Dutch when we really wanted to get at the French. All these, our chief colonies, were obtained, in the phrase which Seeley immortalised, "in a fit of absence of mind," and it is exceedingly difficult to see how the inventor of that description of our imperial methods could have persuaded either himself or the nation, as he did, that we British are by nature a colonising people. It is perfectly true that, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, English emigrants built up a great empire in North America. But there was hardly a single man among them whose chief and immediate object was not to shake the dust of England off his feet, and have done for ever with her and the Government he had found intolerable. At the time of the War of American Independence, there were thirteen different colonies between the Alleghanies and the sea, and they had thirteen different parliaments between them—not so much, as some modern historians like to think, because Englishmen can no more help founding parliaments than a dandelion can help scattering its seeds, but because those thirteen different states had thirteen different sets of ideas of what they wanted, and they were determined to possess legislatures which would satisfy their requirements. Those thirteen parliaments were so many protests that the spirit of England was wrong; and to contend that they were spontaneous manifestations of that spirit is a merely wanton misinterpretation of the fact that they were its deliberate antitheses.

At any rate, the American colonists made all that

plain enough when they became the United States, and left England with nothing but the British Isles and a few isolated river-mouths to look red on the map of the world. The First Empire was gone, and a second had to be found to replace it. But whereas the first had been the result of genuine colonisation, however discontented, the second empire was merely a conglomeration of conquests which were not only unrelated, but unintentional. Clive himself was an unrehearsed accident, and his conquests were already full of a population which has never since ceased to remind us that it is by no means English in spirit, and that the best we can do for it is to leave it to its own civilisation. The conquest of Canada was so unexpected that it was entrusted to a young man, at the outset of his career, in command of a handful of soldiers and in a merely incidental campaign: and when it was conquered, its most fertile regions were already occupied by a race which was not merely alien, but hostile, and which remained so for another century. Australia was discovered by Cook, and completely ignored—unless the imperialists care to claim Botany Bay as a spontaneous manifestation of the English spirit. Cape Colony, the nucleus of British South Africa, was seized not for any reason connected with colonisation, but as a merely military attempt to paralyse the Dutch during their momentary alliance with the French Revolution. Thus three-quarters of our second empire began not with settlement, but with conquest: and each of these three colonies has retained ever since the internal complication of non-British elements whose hostility towards British rule is in each case in direct proportion to its size as compared with the rest of the population.

It is perfectly true that there are facts on the

other side, and that imperialists can make out a good case for imperialism. But all that has just been said is quite sufficient to explain the attitude of the Victorians to imperial affairs. Although they left it to one of their younger sons to formulate the epigram, they were thoroughly acquainted with the facts about the fit of absence of mind—and perhaps much better acquainted with them than Seeley, with his facile habit of cavalier generalisation. They knew that the Cape, for instance, had been conquered not in an absent moment, but deliberately, in the interests of a military need which had long since passed away. Its value remained, to their mind, primarily a value for purposes of war, and the Victorians believed that they had done for ever with wars on a scale grand enough to warrant the retention of a colony of morose and intractable Dutchmen, who were frankly antagonistic to all the Victorian notions of progress and the commercial state. And the Cape merely reflected the state of their relations with their other possessions, none of which promised a future more propitious—and none of which have yet justified that assumption of military value on which their conquests had been based.

Imperialism, in fact, was not a Victorian cult. It would be easy enough to quote, from the speeches and letters of Radicals like Cobden, long passages in deprecation of the whole policy of empire.

> " A people who neither pay our taxes nor obey our laws nor hold themselves liable to fight our battles, who would repudiate our right to the sovereignty over an acre of their territory, and who claim the right of imposing their own customs duties, even to the exclusion of our manufactures—"

that is a sample of the opinion of the colonials held

by Lancashire Radicals who had cotton to sell, and it was a fair presentment of the views of the extremer Radicals generally. And Cobden's conclusion was stated as positively as his premisses: —

> "We are two peoples to all intents and purposes, and it is a perilous delusion to both parties to attempt to keep up a sham connection and dependence which will snap asunder if it should ever be put to the strain of stern reality."

The prophecy has perhaps been falsified by events—although it remains to be seen what policy the dominions will adopt when the Mother Country goes to war for interests which are not theirs. But at all events it is clear that the Radicals of the Manchester school had little to say in favour of an empire which they regarded as merely nominal. And it is useless to retort that imperialism is a Conservative and not a Radical policy, since that is not true of Victorian times. The early Victorian imperialists were nearly all of them Radicals or Liberals, and imperialism was not adopted as part of the Conservative programme until Disraeli had beaten Gladstone by a short head in the race for a party attitude on the question—his second repetition of the time-honoured policy of running off with the clothes of the Whigs. Moreover, the political protagonist of the early imperial movement (Joseph Chamberlain) was himself a prominent Radical: while Dilke, its literary forerunner, was frankly a Republican. All this, however, was well after Imperialism had begun to assert itself: during the middle years of the Victorian period Cobden was the ablest representative of the Radical attitude; and the Radical formula for an imperial policy is best described by the single word—Secession. To the worst of them—the merely commercially-minded

who flourished principally in Lancashire—secession was desirable because the colonies were not, apparently, a paying concern—and in any case the less we had to do with people benighted enough to tax imports from the country which had invented Free Trade the better. To the Philosophical Radicals—the honesty of whose motives was at least above reproach—secession was desirable because continued union was a philosophical insult to the political maturity of the colonies themselves. In the central Victorian period, the only considered imperial policy was that of the Radicals; and the Radical policy was secession.

With the rest, policy was replaced by either opportunism or indifference; and indifference was the more widespread of the two, since the opportunism—the necessity for trumping up some sort of policy to meet exigencies which thrust themselves forward—was naturally confined to those few statesmen who, in these years, found themselves confronted by colonial crises. From time to time, in the ordinary course of its duties, the House of Commons was compelled during an imperial emergency to pay formal attention to colonial affairs. On these occasions the attendance was both meagre and mediocre. Once, at least, there was no quorum; more usually there were present just enough members to carry on. Colonial portfolios were doled out as consolation prizes to those politicians for whom more estimable places could not be found—and in consequence, colonial policy was mainly determined by the permanent officials in the Colonial Office, who were all of them convinced that secession was the ultimate goal. In other words, the general prevalence of secessionist principles in these middle years was directly due

to the indifference felt towards colonial affairs by the men who were primarily responsible for colonial administration.

And in times of crisis, indifference was merely replaced by opportunism. Even where the policy which was improvised proved in the long run to be of vital and lasting importance, its significance in the eyes of contemporaries can be measured by the space it occupies in contemporary history. The Act which, as it happened, formed the basis of the later Commonwealth of Australia, was introduced in the middle year of the century by Lord John Russell, who deemed it worthy of the patronage of a prime minister ; it is described by Russell's biographer —one of the most distinguished historians of the nineteenth century—as "the chief legislative achievement of the session of 1850;" yet he dismisses it, along with all he ever says about colonial policy in this standard biography of a leading statesman, in two out of the thousand pages of which the book consists ; and in the shorter biography by Stuart Reid, no room is found for it at all in the whole of his nearly four hundred pages. Yet both of these works were written near the end of the reign, at a time when the imperialist movement was well under way.

As with Australia, so with Canada ; only in this case the crisis was so much more acute that a special Commissioner was sent to stop the two rebellions and assume the whole government of the colony. And the man chosen for this delicate task was Lord Durham, whose blundering and tactless truculence was already so universally notorious that no ministers could be got to serve in a cabinet with him, and who was despatched on this errand merely in order to ship his clumsy feet out of reach of the

political corns of his Whig colleagues at home. The result was all that could be expected. He adopted a domineering tone which increased the exasperation of the Canadians and had to be disavowed by the home government ; and he found it best to return to England in a hurry and devote his attention to the report which has made his name undeservedly famous. If that Report has become the charter of modern imperialism, it has become so purely by accident; and both the folly of choosing Durham, and the success of the Durham Report, illustrate equally well the muddling opportunism which has made the British Empire what it is.

Finally, if any further evidence is required of Victorian antipathy for the true spirit of imperialism, it is to be found in the manner in which typical Victorian statesmen reacted to the imperialist movement when it began. At first, neither Gladstone nor Disraeli could believe that it was important enough to affect their conduct ; and it was not until the former had put out his ubiquitous feelers for the trend of popular sentiment, and had convinced himself that there was party capital to be made out of it, that the latter rushed in before him and nailed Imperialism to the Conservative platform. Even then, Disraeli failed to get into tune with the spirit of the new age. He was too old a dog to learn new tricks, and although he did succeed in forcing himself into an imperialist policy of a sort, it soon became misdirected, and lost itself in the sands of the European diplomacy to which he was more accustomed. Consequently, the imperialism of Disraeli was continental rather than colonial—wasted in futile interference in the Eastern Question; while Disraeli's main contribution to Imperialism as we know it, was the creation of a more spectacular

title for the Queen to bear in her capacity as the ruler of India.

And now, what was this Imperialism which did so much to dismiss the purely Victorian era ? Why was it that a generation which began by valuing the colonies only as tips for the refuse of its population, ended by regarding the Empire as one of the many signs of God's especial grace towards itself ? The answer to these questions lies partly in the political and partly in the literary history of the Victorians. Like Free Trade, Imperialism began with a book, and before long developed a literature of its own. Dilke's *Greater Britain* was by its very title a rallying-call to Empire—and it came, with all the early gropings towards the new imperialism, from an advanced Radical quarter. But it was ostensibly a book of travel, in which the traveller boasted that in five continents he had been among English speaking people all the time ; and in the enjoyment of a well-written tale of foreign journeyings its readers were insensible of its insidious propagandism, and became imperialists without realising it. With *Greater Britain*, Dilke captured the leisured classes who liked that sort of reading. He was soon followed by the weightier work of Seeley, who threw his powers of skilful generalisation into the imperialist scale, and captured the thinking classes. And since the leisured and thinking classes included between them all that mattered in public opinion among the Victorians, the new imperialism was assured of a brilliant career.

Nevertheless, the new imperialism was not only theory. *Greater Britain* merely suggested, and *The Expansion of England* merely proved, that Britain was something more than " a small island off the North-West corner of Europe." And the fact itself

had been there before it was either proved or suggested. Two years before the publication of *Greater Britain* in 1869, a full-fledged imperial drama in five acts had been carried to its extremely satisfying denouement in Canada ; and in the same year in which *The Expansion of England* leapt into authority as the academic justification of Empire, another drama began at Sydney—in which Nemesis bore Australia along to the same Federal solution as the Canadians had already adopted. Both these courses of dramatic development, with the still more dramatic development of Federation in South Africa, need to be understood in their proper relation to the contemporary movement in literature and opinion which finally welded their mutual and their internal divergencies into one grand, consistent theory of Empire.

. . . . . .

Victorian Imperialism, from its early struggles to its consummation, falls very conveniently into the chronological limits of the reign. Victoria met her first parliament within a fortnight of the outbreak of those Canadian revolts which were the immediate prelude of colonial constitutionalism, and those revolts, and in consequence the whole policy of the government towards the colonies, were perhaps the most important question the Queen's first parliament had to consider ; while at the other end, Victoria died three weeks after the establishment of the Commonwealth of Australia, and at a moment when the pangs of the Mother Country were heralding the belated birth of a Federated South Africa. The story of Victorian imperialism therefore begins in the first year of the reign, and

ends in the last ; with an epilogue appended for the sake of artistic unity.

The revolts of 1837 in the two Canadas were in themselves trifling affairs ; one lasted a month, the other a week. Plenty of far more impressive rebellions have received nothing but a studied disregard among historians, and these two republican misfires could have been relegated to a similar obscurity, if they had not led, by pure chance, to deeper consequences. At the end of 1837, Melbourne's ministry was admittedly moribund, and its life was only prolonged because the young Queen felt the need of relying on Melbourne's worldly wisdom, whereas of the two possible Tory premiers, Wellington lacked the small talk, and Peel lacked the manners, that were essential at a Court which was now conducted by a young lady instead of an old *roué*. Melbourne was essential to Victoria, but he was essential to no one else. He was harassed at all times by divergences among his own colleagues which were only kept in abeyance by the considered policy of doing nothing, and by the knowledge that whereas only Radical votes could keep him in power, Radical measures were utterly obnoxious. The most able and intransigeant of the Radical leaders was Lord Durham, and it was difficult to devise any means of keeping him out of the cabinet; yet Durham had proved himself so hopelessly impossible to work with that Melbourne confided to Russell, his leader in the Commons, that " everybody after the experience we have had, must doubt whether there can be peace or harmony in a Cabinet of which Lord Durham is a member." That, coming from a premier whose power depended upon a diplomatic reticence, is proof enough of the Whig attitude towards Durham ; and the whole govern-

ment was desperate to catch at any straw which offered a flimsy hope that his votes might be retained without admitting him to office.

It was at this moment that Papineau and Mackenzie combined to afford Melbourne a temporary salvation. The Canadian rebellions were simply one more embarrassment added to Melbourne's already intolerable load of worries ; Durham was another embarrassment of a more immediately insistent sort. Melbourne therefore adopted the simple if unscrupulous expedient of setting Greek against Greek, in the hope that Durham and the Canadians would wear one another down, and for a time, at least, relieve the government of two of its distractions. The motive behind the Durham mission was simply that : and Melbourne practically admitted as much in asking Durham to undertake it. The Radical leader took a good deal of persuasion to abandon his prospects of cabinet rank for the elusive distinction of a Canadian dictatorship. In the end, however, his inherent craving for power, or his sense of public duty, prevailed, and Durham went out to Canada as the personified constitution of the colony, whose ordinary constitution was suspended for the purpose.

The voyage across the Atlantic took five weeks, and before the new High Commissioner found himself becalmed in the Saint Lawrence, both revolts were over, and it was not clear what, precisely, was the point of his presence. Durham, however, was no Melbourne, and he set about getting things done with his customary absence of the most elementary tact. The measures which he adopted are in themselves unimportant from a historical standpoint ; they consisted mainly in a general

pardon to all rebels, except eight leaders who were deported to the Bermudas. Now Durham was Governor-General of Canada, and Canada does not include the Bermudas ; and Durham's enemies were not slow to seize the chance of hitting both him and his government simultaneously. Brougham, whose general malignancy had always found special scope in its relations with Durham, concentrated the capacity of an ex-Chancellor upon this petty illegality, and the Whig cabinet was confronted with the necessity of either drowning in an attempt to rescue Durham's reputation, or saving its own skin by abandoning him. Melbourne had no hesitation in choosing the latter alternative. The Whigs gained another short lease of life ; and Durham, resigning his position in Canada, devoted himself to the composition of the report which bears his name.

According to Brougham, his name was the only part of the Report which was written by Durham himself; and historical criticism has found excellent exercise for its faculties in the vexed question of its authorship. Stuart Reid, in the standard life of Durham, shies away from the whole business; and that, in a writer whose special susceptibility to the *furor biographicus* is one of the constant factors in nineteenth century historiography, is in itself significant. Charles Buller, Durham's brilliant lieutenant in the Canadian mission, had an established reputation as a writer and a wit ; and there is both style and wisdom in the Durham Report. Moreover, the Report is distinguished by advanced and enlightened views on colonial policy, and Edward Gibbon Wakefield (the author of *The Art of Colonisation* —perhaps the first text-book of imperialism) was throughout at Durham's right hand. Neither of these contentions, however, meets the fact that

Durham himself was both capable and enlightened; and as the two principal authorities for this challenge to his authorship are Brougham and Greville, both of them consistent tattlers, and the former his declared enemy, the charge against Durham is at least not proven. In any case, the whole controversy is futile. Governor-Generals do not normally act as their own clerks, and there is no reason to suppose that Durham was any exception. He was surrounded by an efficient staff : his nearest companions were men distinguished by brilliant intellects and liberal sympathies ; whether this or that page was written by Durham himself is an idle question beside the fact that the Durham Report was the product of the Durham mission ; and it is immeasurably more important to grasp the contents of the Report than to worry about its authorship.

That is precisely what the historians have failed to do; with the consequence that the gist of the whole report is still consistently misinterpreted. "It is to Lord Durham that the Empire owes the form of its self-governing colonial system of to-day." Such is the considered verdict of the most distinguished of recent colonial historians, and it is completely at variance with the obvious tenour of Durham's intentions. If one thing has emerged more clearly than another in the evolution of British imperialism, it is that " the form of its self-governing colonial system " is based upon Federation. Federation, and nothing else, has proved the only practical alternative to secession and dismemberment. Federation is the foundation upon which rests not only the Dominion of Canada, the Commonwealth of Australia, and the Union of South Africa, but the constitution of the Empire as a whole. If

the British Empire is not a Federation, it is nothing; if Canada, Australia, South Africa, are not federations, they are nothing. So much is common knowledge among the most enlightened of its citizens, and it is admitted by all historians without exception. But the historians have gone a step further, with the result that the Durham Report appears in their pages as the bed-rock of this modern federative imperialism. "It is to Lord Durham that the Empire owes the form" which it has assumed! Nothing could be falser. It is true that Durham went to Canada as the apostle of federation; it is equally true that a few weeks in the colonies converted him into its deliberate opponent. There is no need to withhold from Durham his due. He did, indeed, advocate responsible government for the Canadas, he embodied this recommendation in the Report, and it received legal sanction in the Canada Act of the following year. To that extent Durham was really in line with subsequent imperial evolution—so far, and no farther. The legal jurisdiction of the Mother Country over her dependencies was in question, as it had been in question before the secession of the United States. Strict insistence on her legal rights at that time had wrecked her empire, and left her with nothing but the puny nucleus of its successor. Even Durham, tactless blunderer though he was, was wise enough to realise that a repetition of such legal pettifogging was bound to be disastrous; and he recommended a relaxation of control such as even the *fainéants* of Melbourne's tottering administration realised to be inevitable.

That was Durham's contribution to imperial development—a recommendation that Victoria should not tread in the footsteps of George III.

The thing was merely common sense, and as for responsible government, the colonies maintained all along that they had it already, and that the unpopular acts of the king's representatives were merely so much unwarranted interference with the undoubted liberties, franchises, privileges, and jurisdictions of their constitution. A proposal that the colonies should receive a recognition which the mother Parliament had wrung from Stuart kings two centuries previously, can hardly rank among the grand achievements of constructive statesmanship. What Durham did was sensible, and it was neither reactionary nor destructive. The Durham report was a brilliant summary of contemporary Canadian politics ; it abounded in wise recommendations ; but the long view of statesmanlike imperialism it entirely lacked.

For the ultimate evolution of the British Empire has depended upon Federation ; and federation was deliberately condemned in the Durham report. Durham himself (there is at least no harm in assuming that he was the author) saw clearly the two alternatives, and he defines them with complete adequacy :—

> "Two kinds of union have been proposed—federal and legislative. By the first, the separate legislature of each province would be preserved in its present form, and retain almost all its present attributes of internal legislation ; the federal legislature exercises no power, save in those matters of general concern which may have been expressly ceded to it by the constituent provinces. A legislative union would imply a complete incorporation of the Provinces included in it under one legislature, exercising universal and sole legislative authority over all of them,

in exactly the same manner as the Parliament legislates alone for the whole of the British Isles.

"On my first arrival in Canada, I was strongly inclined to the project of a federal union . . . But . . . I [now] believe that tranquillity can only be restored by *subjecting the Province to the vigorous rule of an English majority ;* and that the only efficacious government would be that formed by a legislative union."

That is a perfectly fair quotation from the Durham Report itself. In it, Durham makes clear the alternatives; he makes equally clear his choice; and the choice was against federation, in spite of his initial convictions to the contrary.

The explanation lies in the words which have been printed in italics. In England and at sea, away from the immediate turmoil of Canadian intrigue, Durham had seen the problem (or, more probably, Wakefield had seen it for him) as a whole. In Lower Canada, *une nation canadienne* was struggling against English bureaucracy to find expression for a nationality which was French and a religion which was Catholic. In Lower Canada, there were three Frenchmen for every member of the ruling race ; and although the failure of Papineau had shown that they were too lethargic to fight for independence, they continued to desire it with all the sullen obstinacy of thwarted Gauls. They hated the English, and the English returned their hatred ; it was the clash of irreconcilable nationalities settled by chance in the same river valley, and bound by nature to trade along the same commercial routes. Lord Durham was an Englishman, and his ear leaned more attentively to English than to French opinions. With a necessarily unconscious anticipation of the

"Saxondom" of Dilke, he was influenced by the English in Canada to regard North America as an English-speaking preserve ; and in order to conciliate this view, he was prepared to advocate any step which would swamp the French in Lower Canada under a flood of English assertiveness. At the moment, the French were discontented both with the home government and with their English fellow-subjects; the latter would probably respond to an opportunity of scoring off the French ; and instead of taking a long view and urging the adoption of some scheme which would guarantee fair play to the original settlers in the Saint Lawrence Valley, Durham yielded to the exigencies of the moment. In consequence, his Report recommends that the two provinces, French Lower and English Upper Canada, should be united under a single government, for only so would it be possible to secure that the French should be out-voted. His recommendations were adopted in the Reunion Act of 1840 ; and the immediate consequence of the Durham Report was that Canada received a constitution which was deliberately framed to silence 450,000 voices in a population of under a million. Federation was frankly rejected ; self-government was denied to a whole nationality ; so much for the achievement of the man to whom "the Empire owes the form of its self-governing colonial system"!

Only a generation was needed to show how short-sighted Durham had been. During that generation Canada was fortunate in its rulers, and sound economic developments which Durham had certainly foreshadowed were quietly consummated. Among these were the construction of railroads (the importance of which in the unification of Canada can hardly be exaggerated) and the recognition of

French as an official language. For soon it became apparent that *la nation canadienne* could not be abolished by being merely out-voted ; a federation, as against the legislative union of the Durham Report, was clearly the real solution of the colonial problem. Accordingly, by the Canada Act of 1867, Lower Canada received once more its own representative assembly; it was then incorporated in the federal Dominion, along with the other Canadian colonies; and within six years the Dominion of Canada was composed of seven constituent provinces. The union of British North America, anticipated by Durham, along with other inevitable and salutary developments, was at last achieved. But it was achieved in a manner directly opposed to the spirit and the specific recommendations of the Durham Report. The dominion was truly self-governing in every province; the French were not "subjected to the vigorous rule of an English majority"; and the union had been accomplished upon a federal and not a "legislative" basis. Federation has since made the whole Empire what it is ; and it is the Canada Act of 1867, and not the Durham Report, which is the Magna Charta of British Imperialism.

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The detailed provisions of that act are relatively unimportant : it is the principle that matters, and in this case the principle was Federation, now adopted for the first time as the official policy of the home Government. If any indication is required of the revolutionary character of the act, it is to be found in the treatment of Australia only seventeen years before. The early history of the Australian colonies is merely a succession of records illustrating the official determination to treat the dependencies

as convenient dumps for imperial rubbish ; and it was not until the middle of the century that the Australians secured the right to defend themselves from deliberate dilution by the refuse of English slumdom. By 1850, the whole status of the Australian constitutions was ripe for discussion, and the Mother of Parliaments gave it her august attention. The debate was typical of the attitude of the English legislature to imperial problems. The estimate of its significance formed by Russell's biographers has been noticed on an earlier page—and Russell was the Prime Minister who introduced the bill. Gladstone has recorded that his speech upon it was delivered " to an indifferent and inattentive house." Yet the Tories, inattentive and indifferent to the imperial question on its merits, used the bill as a stalking horse for shooting the Whigs ; and a statesmanlike measure for colonial development became merely carrion for the spiteful avidity of party politics. As ultimately passed, the Act did no more for Australia than the Act of 1840 had done for Canada. Responsible government was in the air ever since the issue of the Durham Report. Two years after the Canadian act, New South Wales received similar legislative independence ; and all that was done in 1850 was to extend this privilege to Victoria, South Australia, and Tasmania. Such an enactment was of vital importance for the Australians, since it placed them on the same footing as the Canadas, and gave them a legal title to rights which in any case they were determined to exercise. But in the history of imperial development the Australian Colonies Act is merely insignificant. It contained no new principle ; it was no more than the belated application of a principle already established elsewhere.

Unfortunately, the slaughtered parts of the original bill were the reverse of insignificant. Russell himself was in the forefront of the lagging trek towards an efficient imperialism, and his original draft contained a definite proposal that the Australian Colonies should be united in Federation. If these clauses had been passed, this fundamental principle of the modern empire would have received recognition almost a generation earlier than was eventually the case. But the party requirements of the moment demanded, as so frequently in this age of the ostentatious conscience, that the Tories should dish the Whigs. The Whigs were accordingly dished ; federation was dropped for another seventeen years from English politics, and the achievement of federation for Australia was deferred for half a century.

Fifty years later, Australian federation was actually accomplished—this time by the votes of a Conservative government ; for in the meantime the party of Disraeli had realised that Imperialism was a paying political game, and had afforded one more example of the consistent policy (which their opponents, too, were by no means ashamed to share), of giving up to party what was meant for mankind. In 1900 it suited the Conservative interest that Australia should receive the constitution which had been granted to Canada thirty-three years before. Accordingly, fifty years too late, the Commonwealth of Australia came into being, and two of the three greatest dominions were founded on federation.

This achievement had been accomplished only by energetic propaganda; for throughout the whole movement, the colonies have been less anxious for federation than for liberty. The Australians were as indifferent as any of their fellows, and they

needed to be shown where their interest lay. Consequently, they were subjected for more than a decade to the activities of a league which was founded for the purpose ; by 1900 Australian opinion was ripe ; and the first day of the new century dawned upon a federal Australia.

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The Australian Federation League, however, vital and successful though its work may have been, was only one of the minor symptoms of the imperial fever which raged at the end of the Victorian period. In itself it was no more than a local version of the Imperial Federation League which had been founded in 1884, with the written benediction of Seeley. In the previous year, Seeley had published *The Expansion of England,* and this course of lectures for Cambridge students took such a hold of educated Britain that in its first two years 80,000 copies were sold—at a time when the bulk of the population had never even been to school. Moreover, although our own generation has chosen to canonise Seeley as the literary Messiah of Imperialism, he was, in his own day, only one amongst many. The late Victorians went mad about Imperialism, and anything which suggested that the sun was kept working overtime on the Union Jack was bound to be popular. They reverenced their sages (once they had made enough to live on) ; and the Sage of Chelsea was an imperialist. They reverenced their professors (especially their professors of history) ; and Froude and Seeley were both imperialists. They liked their travel books to remind them that all the corners of the earth were for ever England ; and Dilke turned out his *Greater Britain,* a thoroughly pompous, opinion-

ated piece of superficiality, which invented the term "Saxondom" and so made the claim of a moral imperialism over even the United States.

Nevertheless, this early imperialism was not the sort we know now, and its metamorphosis is extremely interesting to trace. In its beginnings it was essentially positive and not prospective ; it set out to describe an existing fact, and not to attain a contingent consummation. The "Saxondom" of Dilke was an accomplished reality. "The Expansion of England" was already achieved.

> "In 1866 and 1867, I followed England round the world ; everywhere I was in English-speaking or in English-governed lands . . . . There are men who say that Britain in her age will claim the glory of having planted greater Englands across the seas. They fail to perceive that she has done more than found plantations of her own—that she has imposed her institutions upon the offshoots of Germany, of Ireland, of Scandinavia and of Spain. Through America, England is speaking to the world. Sketches of Saxondom may be of interest even upon humbler ground : the development of the England of Elizabeth is to be found, not only in the Britain of Victoria, but in half the habitable globe. If two small islands are by courtesy called 'Great,' America, Australia, India, must form a Greater Britain."

So Dilke : and his statements are less eloquent than his omissions. It is "Saxondom" of which he speaks—not of a "British Empire;" and Saxondom is to be found not so much in the colonies as in "the offshoots of Germany, of Ireland, of Scandinavia and of Spain." Above all, it is to be found in America. And America is to all intents and purposes the United States. One third of his whole

book is devoted to the American republic. Less than a fiftieth is devoted to Canada, and of that fiftieth a large portion is occupied with recommending the Mother Country to abandon the Canadians to their own resources :—" At bottom it would seem as though no one gained by the retention of our hold on Canada." The tune is the same when he is speaking of Australia—throughout, he regards secession as not only inevitable, but irrelevant. " What does it matter," he seems to ask, " whose flag flies in the colonial capitals, so long as the colonies of England are propagating her institutions and culture, while the colonies of other countries are propagating at least our institutions ? Saxondom is with us, whether you see it or no. It covers half the habitable globe. Recognise it, and have done with your inconsequent babblings about constitutions federal or legislative. Historians have concentrated upon constitutional issues only because they are blind to the issues that matter. Half the world is English : what about the rest ? "

That was in 1869 ; fourteen years later, Seeley sang a similar song, and his words are too familiar to quote. He sowed his seed in ground already turned by the heavy ploughshare of Dilke, and he reaped his splendid harvest. His contribution was to provide Saxondom with a historical justification, and he gained the reward which the Victorians never stinted to those who helped them to feel learned without much effort, or who strengthened by expert argument beliefs to which they were in any case determined to cling.

And by the 'eighties Victorian England was resolved to stand fast by imperialism. All Europe, in fact, was throbbing to the measure of the imperial theme. France had already founded one Empire,

and was expected to found another at any time. The German *reich* had been unveiled with imperial pomp at Versailles, and was looking around for the landed estate which should establish its parvenu position among the ancient families of the Continent. Nationalism was the mode, and nationalism of a particularly aggressive sort. It led to armaments, it led to protection, and it led to a frenzied quest for colonies by those nations which had none, and a frenzied determination on the part of the others to keep the colonies they had. Britain had most, and was determined to keep them all—even South Africa, which Dilke had never mentioned, and which even Froude, in his most imperialistic moments, mentioned only to emphasise the impossibility of including it in a respectable Empire.

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For by the middle 'eighties all Europe knew that Africa was worth having. The Germans wanted it, because colonies they must at all costs acquire, and in Africa lay most of the land which was not yet subject to civilised rule. The French wanted it, partly for the same reason, and partly because the North Coast of Africa promised to make a useful kitchen garden opposite the south coast of France. Consequently, the price of Africa in the colonial market went up, like the price of any other commodity for which the demand increases while the supply remains constant. Moreover, in 1867 diamonds were discovered at Kimberley ; in 1886 gold was discovered on the Rand ; and both gold and diamonds made an immediate appeal to the essentially commercial mind of Victorian England.

So was ushered in the South African phase of the imperial problem—a phase which had been

satisfactorily settled for years, and which would never have been re-opened if the love of money were not the root of all evil. Africa, which had been included neither in the itinerary of Saxondom nor in the professorial philosophies of imperial history, became the culture-bed of British imperialism; and that imperialism entered in consequence upon its positive phase. The recognition of an existing Saxondom was no longer enough ; it was necessary, now, to broaden the bounds of empire—above all, to broaden them in such a way that they should enclose the gold-fields of the Rand and the diamond-fields of Kimberley.

That, however, is hardly a fair way of putting it. To foreign nations, it appeared that we were indeed broadening the bounds of empire : to the Boers of South Africa, it appeared that we were doing so at their expense ; but the English view was different. In the race for trade and for empire, England has been, all through, in the position of the man who has made his fortune by questionable means. No sane consideration can deny that the British Empire is founded on conquest and not on colonisation. Australia is the only exception, and that a doubtful one, since the English flag was only planted on Australian soil at the exciting close of a neck and neck race with the representatives of Germany. But for Australia, the whole empire has been acquired by conquest. Canada was conquered from the French ; India was conquered from the French and the Indians ; Egypt was conquered from the French and the Turks ; South Africa was conquered from the Dutch. The British Empire has been obtained by force, and in every case at the expense of a European power.

In other words, England made her colonial

fortune in the eighteenth century, and by means which were anything but peaceful. During the nineteenth century England resolved on retirement into respectability, and she became the self-constituted guardian of the respectability of Europe. England was quite prepared to abstain from war-like interference with the *status quo ;* and it pained her belated bourgeois morality that any other nation should think of interference with the *status quo* on its own behalf. The retired profiteer had become respectable, and he wanted the poor to be as respectable as himself—with a particular respect for the rights of the sort of property he had acquired.

That is why the English attitude was so intensely annoying to the rest of Europe. Europe was persuaded of the perfidy of Albion. Albion had given plenty of proof of its perfidy in the eighteenth century. In the nineteenth, Albion announced its conversion and its determination to behave itself, and demanded that the Continent should behave itself too. The Continent, however, wanted colonies, and as it rather admired England's way of getting them, was strongly disinclined to follow us to the penitent form. Moreover, the Continent failed to convince itself that the international piety of this country was anything more than a deliberate and sanctimonious shield of hypocrisy, and pointed its suspicions by reference to English actions which the rest of the world construed as treachery, while England maintained the purity of its motives. The converted profiteer was convinced of his own righteousness ; he was on the Lord's side, and therefore his doings were the Lord's work ; and thus the international puritanism of Victorian England, like other sorts of puritanism since history began, merely

served to irritate the plain man and to make the puritan unpopular. The English are convinced that their motives are transparently disinterested : the foreigner is convinced that we are a deep lot : and England is still estimated accordingly in foreign lands.

The whole South African problem has been complicated by this inability of the foreigner to trust the English, and of the English to understand the foreigner's mistrust. There is an uncanny similarity between the Irish Question and the Boer Question in the nineteenth century. In its relations with both peoples, the English contrived, time after time, to put themselves in the wrong—sometimes in innocence of heart, sometimes with a cultivated indifference to the rights and feelings of others. In the middle of the reign, South Africa was realised to be literally a vast mine of wealth. Englishmen were the most conspicuous of all in the rush for diamonds and nuggets : and both the diamonds and the nuggets were to be found only at the heart of an agricultural territory inhabited exclusively by a race which was by no means English in either sympathy or culture. The Boers were farmers, and farmers they wished to remain. What they had seen of the English had convinced them that English culture was no use to them. Under the English flag, towns arose in rapid succession, and the Boers detested towns. They were a pastoral community, and they had given strong proof of their anxiety to avoid the contamination of industrialism by trekking away from Cape Colony in a solid mass, and establishing separate states for themselves farther north, out of reach of the English law. Even here they had been worried by English missionaries —ignorant fools (as it seemed to the Boers), who

came hard on the heels of a series of bloody Kaffir raids to tell them that the black man was their equal, and that their slaves ought to be released. The Boers knew that they treated their slaves well; they knew that slaves were essential to the continuance of their agricultural polity in the climate of South Africa ; they knew that liberated blacks could be nothing but a perpetual menace ; and so their oath of citizenship included the promise, " I will have nothing to do with the London Missionary Society."

Besides all this, at irregular intervals throughout the century the English had shown signs of questioning their right to self-determination ; and this looked suspicious in a country which, as Europe knew if the Boers did not, was perpetually boasting that its flag was the banner of the free, and which had nevertheless gone out of its way to crush a whole nationality in Lower Canada. To the Boers, it seemed clear that they were independent. In 1836 and the following years the whole nation had quitted the bondage of Pharaoh, and after wandering in the wilderness had settled in a promised land of their own, which had been previously occupied only during the occasional visits of nomadic blacks.

The Boers assumed that they had established an independent state. The English at first showed little inclination to quarrel with that assumption : and when they did, it was with no sort of consistency, and at most unfortunate moments for their reputation. At the time of the Great Trek, the Boers were left unmolested in their determination to cut adrift from British rule. They chose their ground with the considered view of breaking away from Cape Colony for ever. They crossed the Orange River because Britain had repeatedly refused to extend

her territory beyond it, and to make doubly sure they pushed on across the Vaal. There they founded a state of their own, and chose for it a name which signified their immunity from British citizenship. Their secession was tacitly acknowledged by London and Capetown alike—until they found it necessary to repel Zulu raids by a slaughter commensurate with that of the raids themselves. At once the English took alarm, and, secure in the conviction, which they had not yet learned to abandon, that the Zulu was an innocent and inoffensive savage, they espoused the cause of blacks whose barbarism they had not yet experienced, against whites whose worst fault was a too close adherence to the manners of the Old Testament.

In the middle 'thirties, the Great Trek had proceeded without molestation: in the early 'forties, the previously declared policy of the British was deliberately abandoned, and for ill-founded motives of humanity which everyone else naturally construed as a cloak for well-founded motives of annexation, the Boers were dragged once more within the pale of British jurisdiction. Ten years later this policy was reversed: Westminster had discovered that colonies cost money for their defence, the Chancellor of the Exchequer was making brilliant hits with his budget balances, and for the moment the views of the Liberal and Radical secessionists were in the ascendant. In 1854 the Orange River Colony was permitted to proclaim to the world its independence as the Orange Free State. Four years later we even refused annexation to the Boers, who were temporarily tired of paying the cost of their own defence against negro attacks. The English governor who advocated federation at the Boers' request was recalled—this time by a

Conservative government, lest either party should deserve credit for sympathy with the federal idea. Again ten years later this country doubled back upon its previous policy, and declared the Orange Free State to be under British sovereignty ; in 1877 the Transvaal was treated similarly ; the new imperialism was already popular, and in 1881 the Convention of Pretoria re-asserted the British claim to rule the Boers. This, however, was immediately after the wanton bungling which had culminated at Majuba, and within three years the same Liberal government, under the same prime minister, made a fresh convention which simply omitted all mention of British suzerainty.

Naturally, such a convention was liable to differences of construction. Kruger, who had been the chief Boer plenipotentiary, returned to his countrymen with the conviction that he had cancelled the obnoxious clauses of the Convention of Pretoria. The British government refused to break silence one way or the other ; the Boer assumption went for a time without contradiction ; and when in the 'nineties the claim of sovereignty was revived, those —and they were many—who were interested in maligning this country, drew conclusions to suit themselves. It was useless to point out that English interference in the internal politics of the Boer states had only begun when the Boers adopted a policy of deliberately irritating the English settlers in the mine-fields ; when the outlanders, nearly all of them Englishmen, had been excluded from citizenship and taxed sufficiently to pay the whole expenses of the Boer exchequer ; and when Englishmen had been subjected to violence and English women to threats of violence at Boer hands. The reply was as easy—and as sincere—as the defence. The

English settlers had provoked the Boers by their attempt to impose upon their agricultural economy all the vices without one of the virtues of urban life. If the British chose to rear chimney stacks on land where the Boers wished to rear cattle, it was just that they should pay for the privilege. Besides, there was the undoubted and undisputed fact that in those early mining days, the bulk of the English settlers were bad men, while the bulk of the Boers were good ones ; and that both peoples acted accordingly. And it was at least significant in the eyes both of the Boers and of an unsympathetic Europe, that our lust of annexation coincided so closely with the prospect of industrial development in regions which had previously shown no signs of its possibility.

At the end of the century, in fact, British imperialism was frankly commercial ; and it was controlled by one of the greatest men of business that Britain has ever produced. In the 'eighties Rhodes was building his private fortune by business expansion in South Africa ; and his private fortune was bound up in the control of African business by British hands. Consequently his ambition, as everybody knows, was to Anglicise Africa from the Cape to Cairo ; and such an ambition involved the swamping of Boer nationalities under British rule, as Durham had proposed to swamp the French nationality of Lower Canada half a century before. Only by now Canada was Federal in constitution, and British imperialism was equally federal in its aims. Federal or not, however, a British South Africa was bound to leave the Boers in a hopelessly outvoted minority. Consequently the Boers prepared to resist, and in order to oppose them the more

effectively, Rhodes became first a politician and then prime minister of Cape Colony.

Rhodes, however, was the business man *par excellence,* and like a good many other business men he tried to apply to politics the methods by which he had made his own fortune. The difficulty is, of course, that business methods and political methods are two very different things. Business fortunes are the gift of the gods to enterprise, and enterprise, as any text-book of economics will tell us, is essentially the taking of risks. But the gods are capricious ; commercial wealth is distributed largely by chance ; and the successful business man is the one whose luck has favoured him at the expense of rivals, some of whom, at least, are as capable as himself, and only less lucky. It is the common assumption of men who have succeeded in commerce that gifts which have served their commercial career will be equally successful in a retirement devoted to politics ; and having made their fortunes for themselves in their prime, they tend in their old age to try making the fortunes of a community. Only Rhodes was a business man in the grand manner, and instead of remaining content with the more modest ambitions of ordinary successful men, he became not a town councillor but a prime minister, and he occupied himself with the fortunes of an Empire instead of a municipality.

Nevertheless, if his politics, like his business, were always in the grand manner, his methods were always business methods, and the chief of them all was enterprise—the taking of risks. Unfortunately, the man of business turned politician rarely recognises that, in politics as in business, most risk-takers eventually pay the penalty of their hazard ; that success falls only to the few; that whereas the

fortune of a man or a community may be made by enterprise, it can only be kept by the constant exercise of sober caution ; and that his chances of again joining the successful minority are, by the law of averages, considerably less than they were before. There is no denying that Rhodes was the greatest man of business in Africa; there is no denying that he was one of the greatest figures in our imperial history ; and the imperial risks he ran were on a scale worthy of his commercial antecedents. But in his case, as in that of so many others, the luck of his business enterprise failed him when the risks were on a larger scale—and it was the Empire, and not Rhodes, that paid the penalty.

When Rhodes had been premier of Cape Colony for five years, the element of business enterprise in the imperial situation was doubled by the appointment of another self-made industrial magnate to be Colonial Secretary at home. This was, of course, Joseph Chamberlain, and it is extremely significant that the Jameson Raid took place during the short period of six months when Rhodes and Chamberlain were simultaneously in power. Both were supreme products of a commercial age, and both were in sympathy with the fresh political ideals of the newer age which they had helped to make. With both, the Empire was the chief factor in British politics—British politics were, indeed, neither more nor less than the politics of Empire. Hence the commercial development of South Africa was with Rhodes merely a part of a general imperial scheme, and was primarily imperial in value, just as with Chamberlain Protection emerged from its period of discredit for primarily imperial reasons. The new imperialism, in fact, was responsible for some quaint vagaries in the political evolution of both persons

and parties. It is interesting, for example, to notice that Chamberlain and his fellow Radicals started their independent career as opponents of one particular application of that principle of devolution which they ended by advocating for the whole Empire : and that similarly the Conservative party, which under Disraeli owed its existence to the renunciation by Young England of the economics of Toryism, returned to Protection at the end of the century under the influence of men who had inherited the name and much of the policy of the party of Cobden.

At any rate, the revival of Protection was due to imperialistic motives—the adoption of an admitted fallacy in pure Economics was part of the business enterprise of imperialism. Protection, however, was not tried during the reign which had witnessed the economic millennium of 1846 ; it was another aspect of the same application of business methods to politics which provided the only Victorian example of the fruits of this sort of enterprise. Its first manifestation was the Jameson Raid, when five hundred Englishmen invaded the Transvaal with intentions which have remained in the mist of their initial obscurity mainly owing to the fact that contemporary and subsequent opinion has been more concerned to know who was responsible for such a fiasco. Jameson and his troops were captured by the Boers, and their objects, unless they were political and not military, were thus frustrated. Naturally, the diminishing survivors of the real Victorians threw themselves into political hysterics at the notion of Englishmen having been worsted in battle. They had indulged in similar hysterics after Majuba, and they were to indulge in them again during the Boer War. But Majuba was the

work of a Liberal government whose imperialism was more than suspect : whereas the Jameson Raid was deliberately encouraged, if not openly by Rhodes the prime minister, at least secretly by Rhodes the controller of the greatest business interests in South Africa ; and it took place under a Colonial Secretary of the purest imperialist complexion, and while the government in power was Conservative.

The Jameson Raid created a sensation at the time for its own sake ; and it practically made the Boer War inevitable, since it provided an opportunity for the display, by the various interested parties, of antagonisms which were thenceforth beyond reconciliation. Majuba and the Jameson Raid needed avenging, and the policy of the Jingoes was therefore a policy of war—even if the Raid was not a deliberate Jingo attempt to provoke war. On the other hand, both Majuba and the Jameson Raid —in both of which combined not two thousand men had participated—seemed to the Boers proof enough that on their own ground they were a match for the English ; and therefore the Boers were by no means disinclined for a military issue. Finally, the Kaiser had sent his foolish telegram of congratulation to Kruger—foolish both because it held out to the Boers an implied promise of assistance which was eventually withheld, and because it contributed to his own ultimate deposition. In the confidence of that implied promise, Kruger pursued his determination to stake upon war the independence of the Boer Republics. In 1898 there was a Boer ministry in Cape Colony. During the winter he heaped provocation upon provocation ; and early in 1899 war was declared.

Its military details were interesting, but unim-

portant. England was cocksure and careless at first, and three years were taken over operations which had been expected to last six months. But there was never a doubt of the ultimate issue, once it had become clear that Germany was not prepared to repeat, in the interests of a United States of South Africa, those obstetric functions by which France had so willingly assisted the Mother Country to deliver herself of the United States of America. Consequently the Boer War is an interlude in the Imperial theme which it is almost safe to ignore, since its only effect was to give prominence to the principal motive. From the point of view of the Boers it was an attempt to destroy all possibility of a British South Africa. Its only result was to hasten the achievement of a predominantly British federation. If the Boers had not been beaten in the first year of the new century, the Union of South Africa would not have been established in the tenth. That Union has carried South Africa along the same course as the rest of the Empire. Its basis is federation, like that of the other dominion constitutions. It has set the seal of unity upon the political character of the British Empire, and thus the aims of the imperialists have been realised as fully as if there had been no Boer War at all. The South Africa Act of 1910 carried Victorian Imperialism to its logical conclusion, in full sympathy with the ideals of the later Victorian period. There are still plenty of imperial problems to solve; there is still plenty of room for the imperial application of the ideals of a younger generation; but at least the younger generation owes it to the Victorians that it has a unified Empire to which its ideals can be applied.

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There is no point in pretending that Indian

history during the Victorian period falls naturally or easily into line with the contemporary development of British Imperialism. For that matter, it is extremely difficult to fit it anywhere into a book on Victorian politics. Whatever politics may be, they can hardly include, by any stretch of imagination, the activities of a people—still less of a congeries of ill-related races and classes—among whom no sort of political sense has even begun to dawn. It was not until experience had been acquired in an exceedingly cultured school that anyone thought of calling man a political animal; and to apply any such term to the races of India, some of them downtrodden slaves, some of them restless nomads, but all imperfectly civilised, would be merely futile. It was in such a condition that the Indians remained until the very end of the nineteenth century, and it was useless to seek among them the merest rudiments of political possibilities. The people itself it was impossible to consult with regard to their own government: and until some sort of control rests in the hands of the governed, politics are non-existent.

For the same reason, it is impossible to label Indian development in this period as in any sense "Victorian." The government of India was essentially a despotism, and despotism is dead contrary to the Victorian spirit: an age which spent its most strenuous political endeavours in trying to make a reality of democratic control, is false to itself when it manages the functions of government on principles which are the deliberate denial of democracy. Moreover, the most successful governors of India were those who succeeded most completely in leaving their Victorianism at home; and it is pretty safe to say that whenever Victorianism inflicted

itself upon Indian affairs, the result was simply mischievous.

The beginning of the reign found itself busy with a controversy which involved fundamentals. A century before, the English name was almost unknown in India, and English rule was non-existent. Clive and Warren Hastings had had their day, and they and their successors had made both the name and the power of England ubiquitous. Three isolated trading-stations, held on sufferance by a tenure anything but safe, had developed, almost in the ordinary routine of self-defence, into a general control of Indian affairs. The grandsons of rajahs who had condescended to the white traders, now held their crowns as the vassals of a limited company. The outposts of Calcutta had been pushed further and further, until they reached the headwaters of the Ganges: the outposts of Madras had been pushed across the Carnatic into Hyderabad: and the outposts of Bombay had passed through the itinerant defences of the Mahrattas in central India. Three British towns had become three British dominions, and nobody knew where the company's authority came to an end. Governor-General had followed Governor-General, each with instructions to advance no further, and to engage in none but defensive warfare: Governor-General had followed Governor-General in the discovery that defensive warfare meant beating your neighbours, and beating your neighbours meant ruling them as well: and before Victoria had grown her hair long enough for ribbons, British India had unintentionally crept round the Bay of Bengal into Burma.

Under Victoria's uncles England was just beginning to realise to what it was committed. This was the period when all colonies were at a discount, and

colonies which had no room for white men were the most unpopular of them all. For the time, however, India was irretrievably British, and while statesmen at home were still thoroughly Georgian in outlook, statesmen in India were prepared to take their responsibilities seriously. If India must be governed by Englishmen, at least they would do the thing properly: and at once they set about importing efficiency into a country where race, climate, religion and the social codes had combined since the flood in the interests of casual but contented incompetence. The East India Company, whose directors continued to foster a not unnatural interest in dividends, was forbidden to trade at all, and compelled to confine itself to government. Tax-collectors found themselves expected not only to collect, but also to pay in, their taxes. Widows were no longer forced to join their husbands on their funeral pyres. Thugs were discouraged from their habits of indiscriminate murder, however lofty their motives. Moreover, provision was made for the State financing of Indian education, twenty years before any such enlightened principle was accepted in England.

It was at this point that Victorianism stepped in—to exercise the only influence it was permitted over the India which was contemporary with itself. With the inevitably despotic government of India Victorianism was wholly out of sympathy. Our Indian imperialism was an imperialism of a recognised kind—the imperialism of Cæsars and Bonapartes. The imperialism which the Victorians eventually produced was like nothing on earth, and its essential characteristic was an entire absence of that idea of compulsion which lies at the root of the word "imperial." All other imperialisms, including that of

the British in India, have been founded upon force. Victorian imperialism was based upon mutual consent, and an entire absence of obligation. The incompatibility was complete; yet it was upon an Empire of the historical sort that the Victorians decided to graft the notions which lay behind their own spirit of universal *laissez-faire*.

We are already familiar with the idea of the colonies as excrescences bound, sooner or later, to fall away, and with the consequent attitude of continuous readiness to assist them in their independence. Those principles were appropriate enough to communities which had been founded by men accustomed to some sort of democratic control, and founded because the liberty of the Motherland was regarded as inadequate. They were entirely unsuited to a country which consisted overwhelmingly of uncivilised subjects. It is easy enough to talk of Oriental civilisations in India. Nobody can deny that philosophy was fashionable on the Ganges when all our fathers worshipped stocks and stones. But the existence of a matured civilisation in India in the ninth century A.D. is no proof that Indians were generally cultured when their civilisation had ripened into the rottenness of the nineteenth century. A hundred years ago (to keep on perfectly safe ground), most men in India were of low intellectual calibre, combining the mental inertia of barbarians with the moral decadence of a dead culture. Warren Hastings had discovered the secret of governing such a people as this: for the mass of the population, commands and compulsion: for the higher ranks of society, chicane of an order which Europe has fortunately forgotten. He was the most successful of all Indian rulers, and his methods shocked even the Whigs of the eighteenth century. But he knew the

peoples of India: his rule was based upon the peculiarities of their inter-national temperaments; and even Macaulay did justice to the diligence with which he laboured to enter into the Indian mind.

It was just before the accession of Victoria that Macaulay himself was given a deciding influence on Indian development. Macaulay was a great man with a great mind, and all the attempts which have been made to prove that either was little, are merely foolish. But his qualifications for deciding the destiny of India—and that is what his achievements amount to in practice—were more than questionable. He was sent out as a member of the Supreme Council, with the business of making a legal code for India. He was a qualified lawyer, but he had never seriously practised, and most of his studies in jurisprudence were done on the boat between London and Madras. He was a historian, and he knew more than most men about the history of India in the eighteenth century, but he knew it in a peculiarly Whiggish sort of way; and Whiggism, as Bagehot says, is not a creed but a character—a character magnificently unfitted to sympathise with an oriental outlook. Naturally, therefore, Macaulay's influence on Indian law was directed toward a sort of preparation of the Indians for a Glorious Revolution of their own, in consequence of which Toleration and a Cabinet should bulk largely in the mind of some Indian Burke. Still worse, Macaulay's influence on the education of Indians was clearly directed towards preparing them to read the *Edinburgh Review*. Since his time, very many Indians have read it and imbibed its principles, and it is a pity that Macaulay is not here to deal with them.

It was Macaulay's minute on Indian education which set the ball rolling in a Victorian direction

three years before Victoria became Queen. Macaulay was a Victorian at least from the time when, at the age of four, he reassured a motherly sympathiser with his injured leg that "the agony had abated;" and he carried his Victorianism to India. Should young Indians be taught English or Oriental literature?—that was the burning question. And, of course, Macaulay's answer was inevitable. "The literature now extant in [the English] language is of far greater value than all the literature which three hundred years ago was extant in all the languages of the world together." Macaulay was for compelling young India to sit at the feet of Shakespeare, Milton, Pope and Wordsworth, in order to give them good stuff—quite oblivious of the fact that he and the rest of his contemporaries had been nourished, not upon English literature, but upon two literatures which dated back more nearly three thousand than three hundred years.

In spite of this and a hundred other inconsistencies, Macaulay's arguments prevailed. India was launched upon a sea of English educational methods and matter; and where education led the way, material civilisation followed apace. It is the vital criticism upon Indian statesmanship in the nineteenth century that it permitted the complacency of the Victorians (which led them in England to push to ridiculous lengths the liberties of the individual) to crush India into a mould which was fashioned for the west. The misfits and malignancies of modern India are the inevitable product.

Be that as it may, the abolition of Indian social customs—an entirely necessary measure if England was not to condone practices which would have cut at the very root of her own civilisation—was followed by the imposition of western educational

methods; and western educational methods were followed hard at heel by western mechanics. The Indians were for the most part stupid and credulous. Not many of them were improved by having their mental processes crushed into entirely unnatural channels; and they were prepared to regard with the untrained eyes of superstition the railways and canals, telegraphs and irrigation systems by which they were themselves to benefit the most. There were political grievances superimposed upon these cultural grievances—and Dalhousie, who was foremost in pressing upon the Indians the machinery of Europe, also invented the "Doctrine of Lapse" to vex the very men whose greater enlightenment might otherwise have afforded him sympathy. The ruling classes were alienated by this proscription of their ancient custom of securing heirs by adoption where natural heirs were lacking—and it was not surprising that foreigners should construe the British motives as those of an undiguised aggression, since they led, in fact, to further annexations of territory.

Where government is a despotism, its efficiency is bound to depend upon personal factors; and the personality of Dalhousie stands out conspicuously from the history of Victorian India. He was the greatest Indian statesman of the century, and although it is impossible to depreciate the work of a succession of thoroughly efficient second-raters, he, if anyone, can claim the title of maker of modern India. Unfortunately, his tenure of power illustrates most forcibly the fact that Indian government was, throughout the whole period, administrative rather than political. Dalhousie's success was based upon his incarnation of administrative efficiency, and his Governor-Generalship consisted essentially

in doing obvious things thoroughly. Except for a very important modification in Macaulay's educational methods, so as to include not only the use of native languages but also some sort of female education, his work can be summarised as the westernising of India, in a variety of ways which have been already enumerated — from canals five hundred miles in length to giving England an Oliver for its Rowland in the shape of a three-farthings postage. Unfortunately, everything was done in a hurry. Dalhousie was as complete a hustler as Victorian Scotland could produce, and in the eight years of his administration he dragged India into the material civilisation of the West, until the Indians had no notion where they stood, and only realised that their world was toppling about their ears.

All this led naturally to the Mutiny; and greased cartridges, and even the recent lowering of British prestige in the Afghan and Crimean Wars, were small counts beside it in the Indian indictment. The Mutiny was the expiring cry of ancient India; the newborn India of Western culture was still an inarticulate nurseling. And essentially, the Mutiny has no political importance whatever. It furnished Victorian drawing rooms with some convincing proofs that British pluck was as trustworthy as ever. But it failed to grip India; it lasted a few months at most; and throughout it was confined to a single though admittedly extensive district. Moreover, it had no consequences, except that a few t's were crossed and a few i's dotted in a situation already long established. The East India Company was abolished—and in practice it had hardly existed for a quarter of a century; the "Governor-General" became "Viceroy," and continued to discharge the functions he had exercised since Warren Hastings

set the pace; and the Queen took over the nominal sovereignty which had in fact been hers since she ascended the throne. Every book that is written on India in the nineteenth century gives less space than its predecessors to the Mutiny; before long, some responsible historian will have the courage to omit it altogether, and then, though the bones of Lord Roberts and the Queen may rattle in their coffins, the Mutiny will be seen in proper perspective, and rated at its proper worth.

And so Indian Administration went on, almost as though the Mutiny had never happened. Government in India was more than ever a matter of mere routine, politics more than ever at a discount. For politics means the constitutional hesitations of a nation which cannot make up its mind, whereas the Indian Civil Service in the Victorian Age had but one idea, and that it carried out with the efficiency of the mentally inert. Happy is the nation which has no history—and the Indian Civil Service was happy enough. The obstacles in the way of modernisation had been cleared out of their path: the obstacles which modernism created were not yet visible to the naked eye—and the eye of the Indian Civil Service was very naked. This unjustifiable excursion into the history of Victorian India might well at this point close its gratuitous career, but for one final flicker of political interest upon the anointed sea of Indian affairs. And even that—Disraeli's creation, in 1877, of the royal title of Empress of India—was the logical outcome of previous events.

But not merely so. The British Empire in India was undoubtedly more real than the Mogul Empire which preceded it; and the agents of Queen Victoria were certainly more efficient than the agents of

Aurungzebe. There was every justification for giving to the British *raj* a name which indicated its real character, and Disraeli deserves all the credit of calling a spade a spade. Only Disraeli's spades were so distressingly ornamental, and like a good many other Victorian tools, were not always meant to be used for any but decorative purposes. Disraeli was the one man who knew how to manage Victoria in her widowhood; and in making her a titular Empress he was again following his confessed policy of " laying it on with a trowel." Middle-aged women have a way of catching desperately at any chance of securing the admiration which charm can no longer win them; and in 1877 Victoria was distinctly middle-aged. She liked the title; she liked the ceremony, which beat all records; and consequently she liked Disraeli even more than she had done before.

Disraeli, however, was killing other birds with the same stone. This was the period of his forward movement in Imperialism, and that movement was already approaching its Near Eastern climax. Russia was again looking towards Constantinople, and Disraeli was well in line with the Conservative foreign policy which regarded Russian advance in Europe as an affront to British prestige beyond the Himalayas. The Czar had to be discouraged; and Czars, in the nineteenth century, had a way of insisting on the etymology of the title they bore. Consequently there were *Kaiserbunde* in which the modern exponents of Cæsarean principles consorted in imperial amity: and upstart nephews who revived in France avuncular imperialisms as upstart as themselves, were discouraged from claiming equality with either Czars or Kaisers. It was partly for this reason that Disraeli invented a *Kaisar*; it was a slap

in the face for the assertive Cæsarism of St. Petersburg, at a time when the English premier was only too glad to get any sort of chance of humiliating Russian pride. And because Disraeli's *Kaisar* was a *Kaisar-i-Hind,* the invention was a direct challenge to what were considered Russia's most cherished ambitions. There was talk at the time of appealing to the Oriental psychology; of cementing the loyalty of India by reviving the Empire with its attendant splendours and concentrating that loyalty upon a personal focus. If that was indeed Disraeli's ambition, it was a credit to him. Later events in India, however, have not done much to establish its wisdom, and perhaps Disraeli's fame will suffer less if his aims are sought in affairs of more immediate concern. Still, he had his way. The Queen was flattered; the Czar was insulted; English rule in India now claimed to be the despotism it really was; and Disraeli's Eastern policy strode on to the passing glories of Berlin.

Meantime, the Anglo-Indians continued their civil service. The Indians were increasingly westernised in an increasingly Oriental manner; and India passed into politics which are not Victorian, and into problems which no Victorian could have lived to tackle—however largely those problems may be attributed to the Indian misconceptions of Victorian statesmanship.

VI. The Victorians and the Eastern Question

"It seems to me that your Eastern Question is a great imbroglio that only exists in the cabinets of diplomatists" . . . Mr. Consul-General Laurella smiled superciliously, and then said, "But the question is, what is the Eastern Question?" . . . "The Eastern Question is, who shall govern the Mediterranean?" said the Emir. "There are only two powers who can do it: Egypt and Syria. As for the English, the Russians, the Franks, your friends the Austrians, they are strangers. They come, and they will go; but Syria and Egypt will always remain." (*Disraeli*, Tancred).

Most historical problems drive their roots deeply into the distant past. That is one of the safest of historical platitudes, and in obedience to its teaching the historians of the Eastern Question, and its Victorian chroniclers in particular, always begin as near the beginning as they can get. One of the most learned and cautious of them all went so far as to say that "Modern History begins under the stress of the Ottoman Conquest"; but he was a Catholic, and perhaps reluctant to face the alternative version that Modern History begins with the dissolution of the Catholic Church. In any case, he was only repeating one of the truisms of his day, and by so doing he set the seal of orthodoxy upon contemporary text-books, which had a habit of beginning with the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, and ending with its retention in 1878. The best English history of the Eastern Question (and it is modern enough to have been written during the War) goes back further still, and sets out, in scornful neglect of earlier legends, from a starting point in the thirteenth century; and it takes two hundred of its five hundred pages to reach Victorian times.

In spite of all this, the platitude is for once un-

sound: the Eastern Question was invented by Victorian Europe, largely owing to its boredom with the period of peace which followed Waterloo. It is perfectly true that the Turks conquered Constantinople in the fifteenth century, and that it took the next two hundred years to teach them that they could not conquer Vienna as well. It is perfectly true, also, that the eighteenth century witnessed a series of *rapprochements* between European powers and the Turks—and that the Turks (however undesirable their character may appear to European notions of decency) suffered more than the Powers from this contact. But by the eighteenth century the Turks had learnt their lesson, and no amount of anti-Semitic prejudice or predilection can cover the fact that they were no longer aggressive—that, indeed, it was no longer the Turks who were a menace to Europe, but Europe which was a menace to the Turks.

It is fashionable to compare the Turkish advance to that of great waters; and every writer follows the fashion so slavishly that there is probably not a single book in existence on Turkish history which fails to picture the successive flood-tides of Turkish aggression, and the consequent devastation of the flooded areas after the waters had subsided. What they hardly ever do is to make it clear that there has been no flood for two and a half centuries: that nowadays, in fact, the dams of Europe have driven the waters further and further back, until the Turks are merely clinging like half-drowned limpets to their own solitary shelter at Constantinople. There would be no Eastern Question at all if the Powers were content to leave the Turks in possession of a capital they had conquered while England and France were still busy with the Hundred Years

War, and before Christendom had learnt the existence of such troublesome factors as nationality, Protestantism, or even Alsace-Lorraine.

At all events, whether France or Germany has the better claim to this last bone of contention, it is perfectly certain that the Turkish right to Constantinople is a much sounder one. Moreover, not one of the innumerable capitulations which European diplomacy thrust down the throat of the reluctant Porte during the eighteenth century made the slightest suggestion that Turkey should abandon the Dardanelles. Russia, it is true, had designs on Turkish territory, and an interest in Turkish Christians; but Western Europe left the two to fight out their quarrels by themselves—and they settled dispute after dispute by treaties of which French and English diplomats, to the advantage of everybody concerned, never even attempted to pronounce the names. It was not until a generation that knew not Napoleon had tired of the monotonies of peace, and had failed to realise the dangers of international truculence, that Western Europe ceased to mind its own business and began instead to poke its fingers into the Eastern pie. Till Palmerston and his contemporaries discovered the diversion to be obtained by abandoning Canning's policy of non-intervention (and it must be admitted that Canning himself had shown them how to do it), there was never any difficulty in localising the affairs of the Balkans—or rather, there was never any suggestion that Balkan affairs would not remain as spontaneously localised as any other diplomatic differences. Russia interfered with Turkey, usually to the great discomfort of the Turks, and Western Europe took no notice and suffered no annoyance. It was Victorian Europe which discovered for the first time that Balkan

politics called for its interference. This is what is meant by saying that Victorian Europe invented the Eastern Question; and this is why these introductory pages of historical retrospect have been needed to prove that in this particular case historical retrospect is unnecessary.

It is only in non-Victorian times that Turkey has been regarded as the villain of the piece. The attitude of the Victorians was precisely the opposite of this, until the most Victorian of them all, with the most Victorian of motives, reversed the prevailing tradition of English policy in order first to prevent, and then to discount, the triumphs of his rival at the Congress of Berlin. Before that, Victorian hostility was directed against Russia—for the very good reason that Russia seemed dangerous to our Indian Empire; and at the time of announcing his "bag and baggage" policy of ousting the Turks from Europe, Gladstone himself was almost the sole survivor of the Cabinet which had committed England to the Crimean War in support of the accepted British alliance with Turkey: and it is a singular and significant fact, redolent of the very essence of Victorianism, that to the end of his life Gladstone, while persisting in the justice of bag and baggage expulsion, persisted also in maintaining the justice of the war which had sought to prevent it.

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But Gladstone's attitude at the end of the century, while it helps to explain the thesis that the Eastern Question is a device of Victorian manufacture, is not our immediate business. At the time of the Queen's accession, Russia was engaged in one of her periodic worryings of the Turks, and was reaping her customary reward of treaty concessions.

The same thing had happened before, nobody had taken any notice, and Turkey had been practically none the worse. But in 1840 Western Europe was freer from international complications of its own than it had been at any time since the Turks captured Constantinople four hundred years earlier: and this period of freedom from distractions coincided in England with Palmerston's tenure of the Foreign Office, with a time of increasing realisation of our responsibilities in India, and with the advent of the age of busybodies—all of them factors making against international forbearance.

The situation was this. First and foremost, Palmerston was at the Foreign Office, backed by ten years of almost continuous practice, and by a Prime Minister who was so busy letting things alone—Canada and Lord Durham, Chartism, Free Trade, Afghanistan and China, and Queen Victoria with the recently added complication of an efficient husband—that he was only too glad to add Palmerston to the list: with the result that the Foreign Secretary (whose consistent eagerness to tell everybody else what to do is perhaps his best claim to rank as a Victorian) was left with hands as free as his tongue. Secondly, the Balkans offered at the moment plenty of scope for Palmerston's peculiar gift of making wars nearly inevitable, and then reaping the credit of averting them. Turkey was torn by civil war, and the Sultan had made amicable arrangements with the Czar by which the latter provided assistance against the rebellious Pasha of Egypt, in return for a partnership in the control of the Dardanelles. This agreement had been made in 1833 by the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi, and although the spectacle of cooperation between Russia and Turkey was sufficiently unusual to astonish all Europe, nobody,

in fact, had taken much notice for the next six years. Then Palmerston betrayed the first symptoms of that Russophobia which ravaged English policy for the rest of the century. If Russia controlled the Dardanelles, she would become a Mediterranean power: if she became a Mediterranean power she would threaten our trade in the Levant and our projected route across Suez to India: moreover, we were busy at the moment with our first Afghan war, and that simply reinforced Palmerston's fears of Russian designs on our eastern possessions. He therefore met the Russo-Turkish alliance with an offer to substitute English assistance against Mehemet Ali for that of the Czar, and thus the Turks, with their usual diplomatic skill, succeeded in embroiling the greatest powers. It was at this stage that France saw fit to revive her slumbering ambitions of an Egyptian empire. Louis Philippe conceived that by backing Mehemet Ali against the Sultan he could secure a virtual control over Egyptian affairs, and he accordingly gave the Pasha to understand that he might count on French aid.

The situation was now thoroughly suited to Palmerston's turbulent genius. In a year he had succeeded in converting a harmless agreement between two Eastern powers into an immediate danger of European war. By the character of his intervention he was committed to hostility not only with France (which was perhaps not surprising) but also with Russia, towards whom England had previously maintained an attitude of benevolent neutrality. In 1784 we had permitted Russia to annex the Crimea without the least demur: and if that can be ascribed to the circumstance that in 1784 we were fresh from the soundest beating we have ever re-

ceived, the same argument at any rate cannot be urged against our complaisance when the treaty of Kutchuk Kainardji gave Russia, at the expense of Turkish sovereignty, a series of privileges certainly no less significant than those of Unkiar Skelessi; or when, three or four years earlier, Russia received English assistance in conquering the Crimea and the everlasting Principalities, and in violating the neutrality of the Dardanelles; both at a time when an unusual combination of peace and plenty left England with the liberty to interfere if she had wished to do so. The fact is that English policy was mildly pro-Russian, until, at the beginning of Victoria's reign, Palmerston reversed the tradition and compelled this country to wallow for the next fifty years in a completely immoral support of the most immoral government known to civilisation.

It is no use to argue, in extenuation, that opposition to Russia was an essential condition of our protectorate in India. That was indeed the assumption which lay behind English treatment of the Eastern Question till after the time of Disraeli, but so far it has received no historical justification. Russia may have had designs on India: she may have possessed an undesirable influence in Afghanistan; but in the course of a hundred years she has succeeded in doing us no real damage whatever in either quarter, and when at last the logical consequence of Palmerston's mischievous meddlings plunged Europe into the inevitable catastrophe of 1914, England and Russia were fighting as allies, in a war precipitated by Balkan affairs. If the follies of the Crimean War (which will be considered in their place) are not a sufficient condemnation of Palmerston's happy-go-lucky blusterings, we of this generation, at all events, have seen condemnation enough.

At the moment, Palmerston was blessed with his usual luck. Europe was not yet ready for another war of Napoleonic proportions, and diplomacy secured a settlement in the Treaty of London in 1841. The immediate risk which Palmerston had run of two simultaneous wars with France and with Russia was fortunately averted. The Czar, realising, from the alacrity with which Turkey turned from his assistance to the less equivocal alliance of England, that the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi was too fantastic for practical politics, relinquished its questionable advantages, and the powers re-asserted " the ancient rule of the Ottoman Empire " that the Dardanelles should be closed to all warships so long as Turkey remained at peace. The treaty was signed by England, France, Russia, Prussia and Austria, as well as Turkey, and thus the Concert of Europe initiated its inglorious career. The problems of the moment were settled with an admirable show of European accord, and the Eastern Question slumbered for the next ten years.

Nevertheless, the consequences of Palmerston's action remained. Not only had he committed British policy to a Turkish *entente* wholly inconsistent with its traditions, so that for the rest of the reign Russia was the bogey of Victorian England; at the same time he had set the fatal precedent of treating Turkey's relations with her nearest neighbours as the concern of all Europe; and in future the Turks were protected in their iniquities by the consciousness that the Powers would probably follow them into any war they liked to provoke, and that the wealthiest of them all would be on their side. The Victorians had invented the Eastern Question.

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The treaty of 1841 was signed at London, in recognition that it embodied the fruits of Palmerston's diplomacy. The first power to violate that treaty was England—under a government of which Palmerston was a member. But although at the time Russia made great diplomatic play with the passage of the British fleet into the Dardanelles one day before hostilities began, the prelude of the Crimean War involved issues too vast to justify the consideration of technical trifles of that sort. There can be no moral condemnation of our action in sailing to the protection of Constantinople a few hours before Turkey and Russia were formally at war. The prolonged silence of the Russians about the ultimatum upon which peace depended had already made it perfectly clear that war was inevitable; and if we intended to help the Turks, we were merely acting with ordinary common sense in availing ourselves of those few hours to get into a good position for striking.

But did we intend to help the Turks? That was the question of the moment, and nobody knew the answer. The British Fleet had been ordered up the Dardanelles by the British Prime Minister, and the British Prime Minister was by no means clear why it should go, whether it should not be re-called, or what it should do if it went. Clearly, this technical breach of the Treaty of London was a mere nothing if we meant war with Russia; but if, on the other hand, we meant no such thing, it became not so much an example of precautionary wisdom as an excursion with blazing torches into a powder magazine. And the difficulty was that neither Aberdeen nor his cabinet knew what they were going to do; the fleet had been ordered up the Dardanelles only because of a rumour that it had sailed

already, and merely as an attempt at justification after the event. But, in fact, the fleet had not sailed, and when eventually it did so in obedience to Aberdeen's despatch, it was merely accomplishing what it was supposed to have done days before in defiance of his wishes. Of course an attempt was made to minimise the significance of the event, and war was not formally declared by this country for another five months. But the Turks were fighting the Russians, and the British Fleet was keeping itself handy in case the Russians looked like winning; so that the diplomatic meanderings of that weary winter were simply, in effect, a waste of valuable time. "Drifting into war"—Aberdeen's helpless phrase has become as much a classic of the textbooks as his wanton absence of preparation for the war that was bound to come. And whether or not it is true that the decision for war was eventually taken by a Cabinet, most of whose members were asleep, there is no doubt whatever that the whole business, from the first wretched signs on the part of the government of their aimless inability to control the country's destiny, to the unforgivable tragedy of incompetence in the trenches at Sebastopol, is little more than a psychological study in the temperament of Aberdeen and his subordinates.

Aberdeen himself was a weakling, and he got as near as any eminent Victorian to realising it—if a man born before the French Revolution can be called a Victorian. He was Prime Minister only because two better men had recently turned one another out of office, and neither Russell nor Palmerston would yet consent to serve under the other. He had taken the seals of his office only as an admittedly temporary stop-gap, and he had promised to hand over to Russell as soon as such

a step became possible. Russell, who was as conceited as an undersized Victorian could be, regarded himself as the man of the hour, and found himself unable to refrain from pouring into Aberdeen's post-bags alternate demands for the tenancy of Downing Street, and resignations in dudgeon from the Aberdeen Cabinet. Naturally enough, these demands for vacant possession merely irritated the actual tenant; and before long Aberdeen's excusable resistance to the importunities of the tenant in reversion developed into an unacknowledged but none the less recognisable conviction of his own indispensability. Aberdeen, in fact, got so used to refusing untimely requests for his resignation, that when the time was ripe he clung miserably to an office he was obviously unfitted to fill. Perhaps he really was the inevitable head of the Whig-Peelite Coalition; but he failed to realise that if he was necessary to the Coalition, the Coalition was not necessary to the country.

At the moment when the Eastern Question again became insistent, Russell was at the Foreign Office—not because he was the best man for the job, but because his vanity demanded official superiority over Palmerston, who had first been disloyal and then driven him from power. Nobody supposed that Russell was the best available Foreign Secretary: everybody knew that that was Palmerston's own speciality, and that with proper supervision he would probably manage it better than anyone else. Russell's chief interest, moreover, was Parliamentary Reform, and for that reason he was intent on becoming Prime Minister as soon as possible. Consequently, he paid about as much attention to foreign affairs as is usual in an outgoing minister—and meantime Palmerston, the specialist in foreign

policy, was marooned at the Home Office, whence he busied himself in putting all possible obstacles in the way of reform of any sort. Hence one of the most instructing pictures of Victorian statesmanship—a Foreign Secretary, without a foreign policy, using the authority of his office to further a domestic reform which his colleague, with whom he ought to have changed places, was able and determined to thwart by reason of his own official position.

All this is by no means irrelevant to the Crimean War. Aberdeen's senile clinging to his last chance of power; Russell's well-meaning coxcombry on behalf of himself and of Liberalism; Palmerston's dogged persistence in an obstinacy which, as no doubt he guessed, was ultimately to raise him above them both—these were active political issues when the Coalition was called to decide upon the Eastern Question; and the incompatibilities of an ordinary coalition were hopelessly intensified by these additional personal divergences. All through the fog of negotiations in which he was so completely bewildered, Aberdeen was being dragged away from the peace for which he longed by the siren voices of Russell and Palmerston—and both, while luring him into war, dragged him nevertheless in different directions. Russell, as it happened, wanted war—and Reform. Palmerston wanted war—because it would kill Reform. In another quarter also war was desired—and Stratford Canning cared not a fig for Reform either way.

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Canning was the remaining personal factor of importance on the English side—and his personality is one of the most intriguing of the century. Later Victorians, with their conviction—which even

Gladstone in his most unrepentant moods failed to shake—that the Crimean War was a blunder, made Canning the scapegoat. Two generations of obloquy have produced the inevitable reaction, and the most recent works on foreign affairs agree in whitewashing his share in the events which made war inevitable. In the old days it was usual to represent the "Great Eltchi"—"Padishah of the Shah"—as moving Heaven and Earth and the Sublime Porte, in order to precipitate a crisis, under the influence of blind prejudices against Russia and equally blind prejudices in favour of the Turks. The answer which has become fashionable is that Canning did no such thing—that he carried out his instructions, and only asked that his instructions should be definite; that while his personal preferences were for war against the Czar, who had refused to have him as ambassador at St. Petersburg, all that he demanded was to know whether England was to be Russian or Turkish in sympathy, so that he might shape his actions accordingly.

Of course, a case can be made out of his writings in support of this view : any case can be made out for almost any view, from the writings of all Victorians with hardly an exception. They had a knack of persuading themselves that they meant anything convenient, and Stratford Canning certainly had a knack of persuading other people that he meant all sorts of things. It looks very much as though the modern historians have come once again under the spell of his exquisite diplomacy. When all is said and done, however, the whitewash fails to produce anything more than a white elephant. There is no denying that Canning's personal predilections were for war, whether or not he thanked God for Sinope five weeks after war had been

declared. There is no denying that he permitted those personal predilections to colour his conduct at Constantinople—even to the extent of unofficial advice to the Porte to reject the suggestions which he was compelled to make as the official representative of the Queen. There is no doubt that the Queen — who was no fool while Albert lived — wanted him recalled, and begged Aberdeen to recall him; and there is no doubt that Aberdeen, who dare neither recall nor trust him, frankly denounced him as dishonest.

And yet, in spite of it all, the ambassadorial hypnotism held. "I thought," wails Aberdeen in one of his periodical paroxysms of helpless self-pity—

> "I thought that we should have been able to conquer Stratford" (this is a Premier speaking of a salaried subordinate!) "but I begin to fear the reverse will be the case, and that he will succeed in defeating us all. . . . Although at our wit's end, Clarendon and I are still labouring in the cause of peace; but really, to contend at once with the pride of the Emperor, the fanaticism of the Turks, and the dishonesty of Stratford is almost a hopeless attempt."

And so Stratford stayed at Constantinople; the pride of the Emperor (Napoleon III. of the Second Empire) and the fanaticism of the Turks remained unabated; and what with these and his official foes at St. Petersburg, Aberdeen had no notion which way to turn. Consequently, he turned all ways one after another, failing all through either to see an inch before his own nose or to realise that he had better go—until he landed himself and the country into the ditch, to the equal delight of proud Emperor and fanatical Turk, and not much to the chagrin of

Russia, although she was thus condemned to a much bigger fight than she had bargained for.

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And now, what was it all about? Aberdeen certainly did not know. He declared war, and immediately condemned the declaration as

> " a decision which I am not without fear may prove to have been impolitic and unwise. My conscience upbraids me the more, because, seeing as I did from the first all that was to be apprehended, it is possible that, with a little more energy and vigour, not on the Danube but in Downing Street, it might have been prevented."

After the war was over, he defined it with enough inconsistency to satisfy the most exacting of Victorian logicians, as " a war, which, although strictly justifiable in itself, was most unwise and unnecessary." Those who are seeking the causes of the conflict can afford to neglect any possible justification of that particular sort, and conclude that a war which is declared by the man who started it to be " most unwise and unnecessary," can hardly have been fought on the most fundamental of issues.

Such issues as there were, however, demand consideration. One thing at all events is clear—that the war was not about the Holy Places. Stratford Canning was one of the chief promoters of this particular fight, and he was not the man to choose his ground as badly as that. When he returned, after a temporary absence, to Constantinople, the Holy Places were the talk of the *Corps diplomatique:* within three weeks of his arrival he had settled the whole business in Russia's favour, and the monks of the Orthodox Church were left in charge to the exclusion of the Catholics who had been backed by

Napoleon. War was declared by Turkey on the twenty-third of October, 1853; by England it was not declared till March of the following year; and the dispute about the Holy Places at Jerusalem was settled nearly a year before then. Canning's conduct in this had been deliberate; and his success compelled the Russians to reveal their more or less veiled object in the whole affair—namely to claim at the least a right of protection over the Christians of Turkey, and at most the control or conquest of Turkey itself. The Holy Places had merely served as a focus of international hostilities, which would have burst out anyhow in some direction or other. Those hostilities were the fundamental cause of the Crimean War, and the inherent essence of the Eastern Question.

In the forefront of them all was the Eastern Question proper—a question which concerned Eastern Europe alone so completely that Western Europe had to cast about for pretexts when it wanted, for any special reasons of its own, to interfere. This particularly eastern aspect of the problem was centred on Turkey, but Turkey's part was no more important than that of a corpse at a funeral. Respects might be ostentatiously paid to the departed, but the real business in hand was to secure a sufficiently public entrance of the heir upon his inheritance. Turkey, said the Czar, was as good as dead; there was no heir in the direct line, and therefore the interested parties should get together and share out the property with as much appearance of decency as could possibly be maintained. Nicholas himself proposed to take over the home farm—which in this case was Constantinople, and, still more important, the Dardanelles. But Nicholas knew perfectly well that no such move was possible

without previously bribing England into acquiescence. Hence those conversations round the sick man's deathbed, which have been repeated till they are merely irritating. In substance it amounted to this: Turkey was done for, and past all use; before long she would have to be packed bag and baggage out of Europe — and the sooner the better for everybody. Russia wanted Constantinople and the Straits: no other power in Europe was nearly so anxious for them; and so it seemed reasonable to the Russians (whose politics are always at least as realistic as their literature) that no objection ought to be made to that arrangement, provided other folks got what they wanted as well.

As it happened, the only power in Europe at all likely to boggle at Russian aggrandisement was England: neither Germany nor Italy had yet come into existence: France was busy with the consequences of recent revolution: and Austria and Prussia—as Nicholas had good reason to know, though the English diplomats were not so sure about it—were safely amicable. Clearly, then, nothing was needed except to buy off England, and suitable proposals were made on that basis. Everything was much smoother since Aberdeen was a personal friend of the Czar's, and had received similar suggestions with obvious acquiescence a few years earlier. Nicholas, unfortunately for himself, failed to realise that in the case of Aberdeen, acquiescence was merely the cloak for a weakling's inability to speak his mind—and that in any case the English Premier was hampered both by an insistent conscience and by lack of control over the machinery of which he was in charge. So the suggestion was made—the Straits to Russia, Crete and Egypt to England. And if that failed to satisfy English statesmanship that

India and its approaches were safe from Russian designs, then the Czar was badly mistaken.

Well, he was. If there was one thing more than another which Victorian statesmen could never get out of their heads, it was that Russia was after India, and that Constantinople was a long step towards it. To permit the Czar to establish himself in the Levant seemed to them the ultimate monstrosity which British policy could be capable of achieving. It was for this reason that Palmerston had hastened, fourteen or fifteen years before, to press upon the Turks the acceptance of English instead of Russian assistance against Mehemet Ali. For the same reason the Treaty of London was made by Palmerston in 1841 and broken by Palmerston and his colleagues in 1853. As an essay in originality the music-hall song of Disraeli's day was twenty-five years behind the times:

"We don't want to fight, but by jingo, if we do,
We've got the men, we've got the ships, we've got the money too.
We've fought the Bear before, and so long as Britain's true
The Russians shall not have Constantinople."

That is simply an ode to the departed spirit of Palmerston. "The Russians shall not have Constantinople"— it is the essence of Victorianism distilled into song: reluctance to fight, confidence in the ability to win if fighting becomes necessary, and above all steadfast adherence to a plain principle. "The Russians shall not have Constantinople"— and to prove the purity of British motives, Egypt and Crete were righteously refused. Victorian England was proud to be so clearly superior to base bribes. The country which, alone of all Europe, had honoured its word to an Austrian princess in

1740, could show equal honour in its dealings with Turks—and Russians.

Now, as it happens, there was a diplomatic revolution in 1756 which receives in the English history-books rather less moral expatiation than our fidelity to the Pragmatic Sanction in 1740. In the Seven Years' War we opposed the Austrian princess—and for that matter, we treated her very shabbily while we were still her ally; but in the Seven Years' War we fought against her in conjunction with the arch-villainy of Frederick the Great: and then, to show that villainy must have its deserts, we left him in the lurch and concluded peace for ourselves. The text-books—especially the elementary ones—say rather less about all this, and the Victorians were not too fond of laying stress upon it. Nevertheless, the Victorians were as British as Pitt or George III: so that their uprightness in refusing Egypt and Crete as a bribe from the Czar, needs to be considered in the light of the fact that Egypt and Cyprus later became British, and that both were taken as a bribe from the Sultan. In short, the Victorians, too, had their moments of realism. They were capable of rejecting, as scornfully as anyone, bribes which were offered for contravening what they considered to be their interests; they were quite ready to accept the same bribes when they were offered for doing what they wanted. That is statesmanship, and it was counted for good in the silent ledgers of the Victorian heart, while prayers were being offered in the market-places to gods of a distinctly different calibre.

If the wisdom of the Crimean War must be canvassed yet again, this evidence should bulk largely in the account. It is all very well to distract attention from the British to the Continental aspect

of the War. No doubt England may have been dragged into the whole affair at the cart-tail of a French ambition which was antagonistic to English interests : the same thing has been also suggested of a later war, and it may be true of either or both. It is evident enough that Napoleon III was fresh and not too well-loved at home, and that Bonapartism was at least sufficiently realistic to fudge up a war for popularity: it is equally evident that the Queen detested Napoleon, that Aberdeen disliked him quite as cordially, that England and France had been enemies a hundred times and allies only once since Louis Quatorze first felt his feet —all this is true, and yet England allied with France in support of a dynasty in which we had no positive interest—and which collapsed all the same a few years later. Similarly, there is no question that the Turks were as eager as the French to jockey us into hostilities on their behalf—and not a bit less successful. After all this—and it is, in any case, poor justification for a war to say that our diplomacy failed to avert it ; especially when the prime minister has declared, like Aberdeen, that only a little more effort was needed—there still remains the fact that the war was fought for aims which were afterwards abandoned—for Turkey, and Turkey was our foe in 1914, and long before that the catspaw of German ambition ; for the Second Empire—and the Second Empire speedily made way for the Third Republic ; for the honour of nations, in vindication of the principle that powers shall not divide lands that are not yet theirs—and soon we were seen appropriating under the guise of friendship the territories we had refused to be seen openly stealing, without the shadow of a difference in the result to Turkey, which lost them anyway.

It may be better for international morality that territorial changes should be made in this manner and not the other : but if so, the morality must be of a particularly Victorian consistency.

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It is unfortunate that political histories, in dealing with wars, so frequently permit themselves to stray into the irrelevancies of military operations. Fighting is not politics, though the converse is not necessarily so true ; and the blundering mismanagement of the Crimea, our shamefaced spongeing on the French for the rudimentary requirements of an expeditionary force, the atrocious incompetence of the first French commander and the equally atrocious puns which were made about him—all these are foreign to our theme. The Victorians themselves persisted in regarding the Crimean War chiefly as a combination of the Charge of the Light Brigade and the Lady of the Lamp —the romance of whose mission industrious historians have recently reduced to a sort of glorified card-index system. It is enough that the war was fought; that Aberdeen immediately regretted beginning and was not permitted to finish it ; and that ultimately Palmerston (surely the only statesman thoroughly in sympathy with it) conducted to a professedly triumphant conclusion its perverted object of capturing Sebastopol—at a cost of forty per cent. of the lives engaged in the attack. That, to the Victorians, was a satisfactory basis for peace.

In this case, as always, the preliminary negotiations are unimportant in comparison with the character of the settlement itself. The Peace of Paris is open to the same criticism as the war

which it concluded—that it was founded on no fundamental or permanent principle. The hapless inconsequences of English policy at this period gained nothing from the fact that the conduct of the war was entrusted to an amiable old man who was made for peace, and the conduct of the peace negotiations to a truculent old man who was made for war. Palmerston himself adequately condemned both the Peace of Paris and the statesmanship which produced it, when he estimated, with characteristic cynicism, that it might last as long as he did himself—and he was over seventy. In the event, Palmerston lasted for nine more years, and the peace for fifteen, so that by his own standards he was amply rewarded.

Those standards, however, took no account of the moral and material cost which posterity is bound to consider. England lost thirty thousand men and forty-one million pounds : the rest of the combatants—if patriotism permits the notice of such extra-national phenomena—lost half a million men and a corresponding amount of money. The French Empire received a temporary fillip which speedily spent itself—largely at the expense of this country, which in its first European war since Waterloo was seen playing second fiddle (and that incompetently) to Napoleon's nephew. This was the price paid by Europe, after precipitating an unnecessary war, for what amounted in practice to nothing more than the restoration of peace. The Turkish Christians had to be content with a paper promise of equality as vague and fruitless as all its predecessors. Turkey was awarded the meaningless honour of membership of the European States system, with no sort of guarantee that her behaviour would improve up to the required average of

decency. The Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia were left for the moment in their old position; and the independence which they soon achieved can hardly be regarded as a result of the war, since the winning side—England included—had fought to prevent it. For the rest, Russia was kept from Constantinople, and the Black Sea was neutralised. Thus the sovereignty of both Czar and Sultan was infringed, to the infinite disgust of international lawyers, and to nobody's advantage but that of the Black Sea pirates. Moreover, this neutralisation of the Black Sea was the only tangible result of the whole war, in which England had staked not only her resources but her honour. So that when, in 1870, Russia decided to repudiate her Black Sea obligations, while the western powers were fully pre-occupied with the Franco-Prussian War, and Austria was nursing her memories of Sadowa into an affection for the new German Empire, Great Britain paid the penalty of her past foolishness and present isolation by a practical acquiescence, the indignity of which was merely emphasised by a futile protest. Thus, within fifteen years, every single fruit of the Crimean War had rotted away, and the Victorians who had provoked it were forced to console themselves with such idealised recollections as they dare cherish of the mad muddle into which they had so capriciously flung themselves, with such barren results.

This practically enforced consent of Britain to forfeit the only remaining advantage derived from the Crimean War, was admittedly a hard knock at our prestige. Whatever complacency the Victorians may have had about it, the rest of Europe was convinced that in the Crimea and at Paris we had simply made fools of ourselves. We had blundered

through a succession of military mistakes to a victory distinctly Pyrrhic in character, and now Russia, the presumably beaten power, was reaping a good proportion of what she had fought for, simply because Bismarck wanted to pay her for her benevolent neutrality in his struggle with France. However feebly and foolishly, the allies had forced on Russia in 1856 something of their requirements ; fourteen years later the Paris settlement was reversed, and England's only reply was a scrap of paper. We were permitted to save our diplomatic face by solemnly concerting a Peace of London which gave formal ratification to the Russian delinquency : "Our beaten foes," we said in effect to Europe, "shall not denounce on their own initiative engagements which we have forced upon them at the cannon's mouth: our permission must be demanded—we will give it (Heaven knows we cannot help it) but we must have a chance of backing down with some sort of dignity." Bismarck was perfectly willing—so too was Gortchakoff, for Russia : and thus the stage was set for the solemn farce of declaring that, by British consent, the Crimean War was null and void.

Any other step would admittedly have meant war with Germany, Russia and Austria—with a bankrupt and defeated France for our ally. It is not that the Black Sea clauses of the Treaty of Paris ought not to have been abrogated : instead, they should never have been made. The Treaty of 1871 is not in itself absurd : it is simply an effective denunciation of the policy which had already led to the Crimea, and was soon again to lead to the Treaty of Berlin. The Treaty of Paris lasted for fifteen years ; the Treaty of Berlin lasted a good deal less. They were both acclaimed by statesmen

of a conservative mould as enshrining Peace with Honour. They were both failures ; and they both, sooner or later, made Britain look foolish.

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The fiasco of 1871 was merely the complement of 1856, and Palmerston was the man most to blame. In 1871, however, Gladstone was prime minister, and he was keeping his customary eye on the cash-box and the Nonconformists. Both influences were pacific, and conservative minds consequently drew the facile but faulty inference that the national indignity was due to the parsimony of Liberalism and the pacifist prejudices of its supporters. Three years later, Disraeli was in power, and determined to substitute for the colourless and uninspiring policies of peace and retrenchment the rousing slogan of a new and aggressive imperialism. We have already seen that his estimate of the forces available for imperialistic advance was badly at fault, and that he completely failed to anticipate that the imperialism of which he was indeed witnessing the birth, would be anything but the old-fashioned meddling with Continental politics that he imagined it to be. The rising movement looked, in fact, towards an economically united Commonwealth of Nations—and Disraeli could still see no further than Constantinople. He has consequently received his full share of condemnation, from political opponents who objected to his cutting a dashing figure at their expense, and from political supporters who see no use in his laboured resurrection of a policy discounted by previous failure and hopelessly at variance with the subsequent ideals of the Conservative party. There are Conservatives who still maintain the value of the Crimean War—

or there were, a few years ago ; there is hardly one to speak in favour of the flashy imperialism of Disraeli's Indian summer.

The truth is that, with an Atticism somewhat surprising in a compatriot of the Apostle Paul, Disraeli was never free from the attraction of taking up some new thing: during his political adolescence, he had taken up the Young England movement, with an obbligato of fashionable novels : during his political maturity, he had taken up the reform clothes of the Whigs while they were bathing : and now, during a political nonage as self-conscious and as vulgar as his political puberty, he took up the new imperialism—only he took it up at the wrong end. That is at the bottom of his trip to Berlin. The Liberals, by doing nothing, had revealed the impotence of English diplomacy. Disraeli would do something definite, and make England once more the arbiter of Europe.

His confidence was confined within the usual Disraelean limits of infinity. " I really believe," he wrote, " the Eastern Question that had haunted Europe for a century, and which I thought the Crimean War had dismissed for half another, will fall to my lot to encounter—dare I say, to settle?" There was not much, at any time, which Disraeli dare not say of the possibilities of his own statesmanship. " The old Jew—that's the man," said Bismarck at Berlin ; and it embodied Disraeli's idea of the situation, though probably not Bismarck's. The decisive personal factor at Berlin was that of no Jew. It was Bismarck's own policy which Disraeli was being compelled in appearance to force upon him ; the complacency with which all parties went away marked the achievement of aims, some of which were lasting and some of which were not :

and Disraeli did not live to see the distinction between them.

The Eastern Question in its conventional character was, however, only the final phase of Disraeli's international fireworks. He began in Egypt, where his purchase of the Suez Canal shares was sound, if sensational, finance, since it gave the virtual control of the highroad to India into hands which have proved at least as honest as anybody expected, or as any other hands would have been. But in the same year Herzegovina revolted, and within a few months the whole Balkan Peninsula was red hot with the circulation of electric passions against the Turkish tyranny. Serbia and Montenegro followed their subject kinsmen of the north-west into open hostility, and the attempt of Bulgaria (whose hatred for Turkey was quite definite, if its ethnology was not) to imitate their example, led to those Bulgarian atrocities which finally convinced the Powers that intervention was inevitable.

Naturally enough, Russia was the first to feel concern : she was herself predominantly Slavonic, and she was the chief nation in the communion of the Orthodox Church—both strong against any toleration of Turkish conceptions of persecution among the Orthodox Slavs of the Peninsula. There is a good deal to be said against Russian politics at home and abroad ; but granting that Czardom was more deeply tarred than any other government in Europe with the taint of domestic despotism and foreign aggression, there is still no denying that the Balkan Christians needed protection, and that Russia was more anxious and better qualified than any other state to protect them. Yet the one principle which emerges from the diplomatic welter which led to Berlin is the determination of the

English government to permit no latitude to Russian initiative. The bugbear of the Himalayas haunted the councils of Christendom; and because England dare run no risk, however slight, of developments in Europe which appeared to increase the possibility of a Russian march through Afghanistan, Disraeli decided in 1877 to repeat a policy—and a Whig policy at that—which was already recognised by the political world as a blunder. The Whigs had "backed the wrong horse" (the phrase came from one who was Disraeli's colleague during this crisis), and their gambling debts had long since been paid. Yet once again Disraeli staked the country's peace and honour on the same worn-out hack, and even permitted his "honest broker" at Berlin to persuade him that he was bringing away the winnings. The absurdity of that complacency is sufficiently shown by the universal condemnation which Disraeli's policy has received from friend and foe alike; it is a favourable biographer who says that he

> "chose a course which gave him for the moment an ephemeral glory, but it was at the cost of undoing the effects of his whole political life, wrecking again the party which he had reorganised, and giving a fresh lease of power to the revolutionary tendencies which threatened the dismemberment of the Empire."

That, however, can wait for the moment. It is at this stage more important to remember that, whatever the success or failure of his policy, it was based upon faulty principles; that in consideration of the doubtful possibility of a Russian advance towards India he dashed into fragments a real hope of solving the Eastern Question. Turkish government was frankly barbarian; and whether fifteen or fifty

thousand Bulgarians were slaughtered, they ought to have been avenged ; still more, it ought to have been made impossible for the Sublime Porte to repeat the experiment upon the Armenians twenty years later. The ambitions of Russia in the direction of the Indus were at their worst an affair of politics. The obligation upon Europe to render impotent the red hand in the Balkans was an affair of honour and of morality, and honour and morality should have had the higher claim. Make all possible concessions to the belief in Russia's evil intentions—and all the yet blinder concessions to the possibility of their realisation ; and it still remains transparent that the cause which led Russia towards Constantinople was the cause of the right, and the cause which led England to resist her was that of international immorality.

Disraeli's case is by no means improved on consideration of the Russian attitude. There are occasions in the history of the Eastern Question when Czars cannot be acquitted of a dangerously aggressive nationalism ; but this was not one of those occasions. The nationalism, in this instance, had not emanated from St. Petersburg. It was generally epidemic in Europe throughout the century, and particularly its second half. In 1875 it had already made Germany and Italy—not to mention the earlier instances of Greece, Montenegro, Serbia and Roumania. The recent history of the last three countries was adequate evidence that the Balkans were not without symptoms of the complaint which had already burst out at Sadowa and Sedan, and was shortly to provide the serum with which the British Empire was to be inoculated against its threatened dissolution. The ubiquitous nationalism which in the North-west corner of Europe mani-

fested itself in the comparatively mild fever of Imperial Preference and the Boer War, became in the South-east a raging pestilence which threatened to decimate the lands under Turkish rule ; and still Disraeli encouraged the Sultan in refusing to instal a decent drainage system.

The iniquity of the whole business was apparent. The Turks could not govern their provinces with a minimum of civilised efficiency, or prevent them from becoming breeding grounds for the virus of war. The provinces themselves were anxious for an independence with which both they and the rest of Europe would have been at least as comfortable as they were already. Russia was bound, by the twofold tie of race and religion, to encourage their aspirations, and to limit their oppression. Nevertheless, the Czar moved with caution. He was from the first urgent for a joint action by the Concert of Europe which would guarantee the purity of Russian aims from the taint of a merely selfish nationalism. He accepted the famous Andrassy note which embodied Austria's proposals for compelling Turkey, with the co-operation of all the Powers, to introduce suitable reforms, and England accepted it, too, along with the rest of Europe. When, in the following year (1876), the difficulty remained unsolved and the Andrassy note was promised a more practical application in the Berlin Memorandum, the Czar accepted that also—as did Austria, Prussia, France and Italy ; in fact, all Europe, except England. Yet the Berlin Memorandum differed in not one important detail from the Andrassy Note which England had accepted the year before. In the meantime it had appeared to the Semitic intelligence of Disraeli that such a combination as was proposed against the Semite

at Constantinople would, in fact—whatever its motive—do Russia more good than harm : and no good of any sort must be permitted to Russia, lest one day she use it in the distant East, against a power which in Asia and in Europe alike was stronger than any other.

The abstention of England from participation in the Berlin Memorandum naturally impaired its value, and there was little reluctance to withdraw it when a couple of revolutions in Constantinople rapidly deposed two Sultans and introduced another, who was as free with empty promises as his predecessors. Turkey presented herself to the world anew as a state with a constitution—which she merely ignored. The Turks were already conscious that they had a great Power in tow, and the farce which had led to the Crimean War was now repeated. England was safely Turkish, whatever happened, and therefore the Turks withdrew, in accordance with their diplomatic custom, into the shell of an impenetrable obstinacy. Realising that the Czar, at any rate, was determined to see some concrete evidence of a reformed government in the Turkish provinces before he called off the Slavs of the Balkans, the Porte stubbornly announced that there would be no reform till the provinces had accepted an armistice. Diplomacy was at its final deadlock—primarily because England was backing the Turks. It was because England was backing the Turks that war inevitably followed ; and because we were not prepared to give practical expression to our moral support, the Turks were beaten outright, and at San Stefano were compelled to sign away most of their remaining rights in Europe. The Russo-Turkish War was precipitated by the English support of Turkey: the Russian vic-

tory, and the treaty which enshrined the fruits of that victory, were due to the English failure to make its support active as well as moral. Yet it was Disraeli, the man responsible for the whole crisis, who immediately determined to undo the results of his own statesmanship.

The Treaty of San Stefano registered the fact of the situation—that the Russian victory had been overwhelming ; and Disraeli flew into the Russophobian hysterics which might have been expected. " It abolishes," he said of the Treaty,

> "the dominion of the Ottoman Empire in Europe; it creates a large state which, under the name of Bulgaria, is inhabited by many races not Bulgarian . . . all the dominions of the Ottoman Porte are . . . put under the administration of Russia . . . The effect of all the stipulations combined will be to make the Black Sea as much a Russian lake as the Caspian."

Such was his considered view of the significance of San Stefano, and it bears about as much relation to the realities of contemporary politics as the sartorial fripperies upon which he had climbed to his earlier success bore to the figure they concealed. Russia, in fact, had carried into the peace negotiations the same moderation and self-restraint as had marked her conduct before the declaration of war. When the terms of the peace are analysed, it becomes apparent that Russia herself received far less than an unqualified conqueror might reasonably have demanded. San Stefano registered, indeed, the fact of the Russian triumph ; but it registered that triumph less in the interests of specifically Russian ambitions, than in the interests of the Balkan Christians who looked to Russia for protection. Many of its clauses were merely a formal recogni-

tion of conditions which had existed long before the war began—and the confirmation of legal independence for Serbia, Montenegro and Roumania was no more disquieting or anomalous than the similar recognition in 1648 of an independence which Switzerland had won three hundred years before. In the north-west Balkans, it is true, Bosnia and Herzegovina were practically ceded to Austria; but no amount of political falsification could contrive to represent that as an accession of strength to Russia. For herself, Russia took no territory in Europe except Bessarabia, which had been hers before the Crimean War ; in Asia, she received Kars, Batoum and parts of Armenia—which did indeed improve Russia's position at the Eastern end of the Black Sea—with over two thousand miles of Asian plains, culminating in the Himalayas, between that and our Indian frontier. Moreover, even Disraeli consented at Berlin to the Russian retention of all these places except Armenia—and the Turkish commentary on the latter modification was the Armenian massacres of the middle 'nineties.

The Treaty of San Stefano was, in fact, essentially identical with its successor at Berlin, with the exception of the clauses relating to Bulgaria ; and it is upon those clauses that Disraeli was compelled to base his presumption of Russian aggression, and his theatrical insistence upon a complete revision of its terms. By the earlier treaty, Bulgaria was permitted to stride the Balkans so as to include the valley of the Maritza almost as far as Adrianople, and a coastline on the Black Sea two hundred miles long. Nobody disputed that this would include in the new and virtually independent Bulgaria " many inhabitants not Bulgarian " (Disraeli may be permitted his rhetorical exaggeration of " inhabi-

tants " into " races ") ; that it would, in fact, remove many Turks from the government of the Sultan. But that, however useful an argument for Tory demagogues in Western Europe, was not the heart of Disraeli's contention—and again, even at Berlin, he failed to maintain his own criterion, since some Turks were still included in Bulgaria as he permitted it to be established, and very many Bulgarians were left under the Turkish yoke. The specious plea of racial integrity may, in fact, be ignored—and perhaps Disraeli was not anxious to exaggerate the hardships of Semites who found themselves subjects of a Christian country. Neither nationalism nor equity was the moving force of Disraeli's diplomatics at Berlin. It was Russia that had secured for Bulgaria its chance of escape from the rule of the Porte ; and Bulgaria might be expected in gratitude to place its newly won independence at the disposal of Russian aggrandisement. Disraeli was wearing the political spectacles of Palmerston, and the consequent distortion was considerable. Bulgaria within a hundred and fifty miles of Constantinople meant, for him, Russia within a hundred and fifty miles of Constantinople; and that was the sole reason why he hurried to Berlin to erect the barrier of the Balkans in protection of the Turkish capital.

At Berlin, Disraeli was permitted to pose as the arbiter of Europe, so long as Bismarck got what he wanted. Most of the provisions of San Stefano were solemnly re-enacted with unimportant modifications. Bulgaria alone was shorn of much of her promised glory : and the name of Eastern Roumelia was invented to disguise the fact that the valley of the Maritza was at least as much Bulgarian as Turkish, and that its retrocession to the Porte com-

bined a racial injustice, which was inevitable either way, with an entirely unnecessary affront to the political convenience of Europe. Constantinople received once more a breathing-space three hundred miles in length between itself and the Bulgarian minion of the Czar ; and Disraeli returned to England boasting of having secured "peace with honour," full of years and fuller still of self-satisfaction. And in the third year he was gathered to his fathers.

Palmerston had given his Paris Treaty ten years to last, and had taken good care to die at the end of the ninth, while the settlement had still an unexpected six years before it. Disraeli died three years after the conclusion of the Treaty of Berlin; the only important provision of that treaty which was not a repetition of the one he had wrecked, outlasted him by only four years—and for this reason posterity will increasingly wonder why contemporaries considered it a landmark. In 1885 the Bulgarians took matters into their own hands: both Bulgaria proper (as constituted by the Treaty of Berlin), and the anything but *soi-disant* Eastern Roumelia, elected the same monarch and achieved political union. And so, within seven years of Disraeli's excursion to Berlin, the Treaty of San Stefano was, after all, an accomplished fact. Russia had lost the Crimean War and yet had soon secured her objects in fighting : she had won her latest war against the Turks, and been compelled to withdraw the treaty which registered her success ; and yet that treaty survived the one which had been devised to replace it. Thus Disraeli's statesmanship in the East falls under the same condemnation as that of Palmerston—that it was merely a piece of ephemeral patchwork : and the only difference was

that Palmerston possessed the sense which Disraeli lacked, to see that his settlement could not endure. Disraeli had split his party and deprived it of power for a policy which the party itself disapproved and Europe speedily abandoned ; and the complacency with which he left the political arena was justified neither by immediate expediency nor by the canons of far-sighted statesmanship.

It is by the latter alone that posterity has any right to judge him: and in this respect he stands condemned out of his own mouth. The principal fault which he found with the Treaty of San Stefano was that " it abolished the dominion of the Ottoman Empire in Europe "— a consummation upon which the whole of Europe was prepared to concentrate, if only there was some chance of its accomplishment. Disraeli's alternative was to " consolidate " the Turkish Empire as a barrier to the hypothetical aggression of Russia against Britain in the East— and his particular method of consolidating it was to confirm the independence of Serbia, Montenegro and Roumania, to hand over Bosnia and Herzegovina to the Austrians, and even to agree that Bulgaria should be protected by Russia, and Armenia commanded by Russian military acquisitions. All this was embodied in the Treaty of Berlin ; but that treaty cannot be considered apart from the simultaneous agreement which took place between England and Turkey. By this agreement Disraeli again gave expression to his policy of Turkish consolidation—this time by depriving the Turks of Cyprus ; and it was only because even he was not capable of an undiluted realism in politics that he declined Bismarck's suggestion that we should take Egypt as well.

Nevertheless, Egypt became British, and England

has ceased even the pretence of friendliness to the Turks. The power which professed to be Turkey's one unshaken defender against the robbers of Europe picked the plums she most desired among the Turkish possessions ; and so far from maintaining her attitude of righteous concern for the Asiatic balance of power when Russia proposed to add a few more to her forty millions of Asiatic subjects, England has increased her own three hundred millions by filching Turkish territories which she was ostensibly defending. We pay the penalty in the general European conviction of our perfidy; and instead of reaping a reward in the added security coveted by Disraeli for our Indian Empire, we diverted Russia's immediate ambitions from the Black Sea (where, in any case, Disraeli's anticipation of a Russo-Bulgarian *entente* was ridiculously falsified) towards the Himalayas; and at the same time confounded our own diplomacy by rushing into an Afghan war in hysterical alarm because the Afghans had received a Russian envoy and declined an English one, at the moment when the government was vainly denying the existence of a secret treaty with the very power against whom our efforts were supposed to be ultimately directed.

Meanwhile Nature was not slow to fill the temporary vacuum at Constantinople. The Turk was at last convinced that British promises were as useless in war as they were convenient in diplomacy, and the open acquisition of Cyprus, followed so closely by the veiled acquisition of Egypt and the Soudan, ended our influence with the Porte. Our place was rapidly taken by the statesman who had stage-managed Disraeli's elaborate antics at Berlin—and German penetration superseded the understanding between Turkey and Britain. By the

end of the reign Palmerston's policy of bolstering up the Turks had had its day; the Victorian parenthesis in the Eastern Question had been brought to a close; and Englishmen were again free to remain loyal in their foreign politics without at the same time betraying their religion and their humanity.

VII. The Crown and the Constitution

"Certanly ther mey no grettir perell growe to a prince than to haue a subgett equepolent to hym selff." (*Sir John Fortescue*, The Governance of England).

THE Victorians were a people of tradition. So, for that matter, are the people of every country and every age. Where safety is the prevailing consideration, the only steps to take are those which have been taken before without mishap; and for those, tradition is the only guide. But the Victorians made more of tradition than that. They cherished the traditions which they inherited, but they cherished no less the traditions which they made. That is one of the reasons why the Victorians made life such a laborious business. They had to obey, not only the wisdom of their fathers, but also the wisdom which they hoped to teach their sons; and the double burden was heavy. It was they, for example, who created the public school and university traditions, which are as Victorian as most of the universities and public schools. It was they who fixed the traditions of Methodism without the Church and Evangelicalism within it — and of Anglo-Catholicism to redress the balance. Above all, it was they who gave final form to the tradition of the Constitution. That was their most valued contribution to English politics; once they had accepted it, it received the same inviolable sacrosanctity as the rest of their traditions; and they invented for it a specious antiquity which they valued none the less because it was false.

In this tradition of English constitutionalism there was no room for an active monarchy, and the Victorians therefore persuaded themselves, with an ease born of practice in self-deception, that the

English monarchy was nothing but what the people made it. They were able, of course, to quote chapter and verse from Burke and the older Whigs, with their apotheosis of the Revolution Settlement. Unfortunately, however, not only for Burke and his older Whigs, but for the Victorians as well, the Revolution had in fact settled considerably less than the Whigs, and even the Tories, imagined; and there is Dunning's notorious motion to prove that a century after the Revolution the power of the Crown had increased, was increasing, and ought to be diminished. The Teutonic inanities of the first two Georges were all very well for Walpole, and they served his purpose; but they had far less permanent influence on the constitution than a good many historians have realised; while the more insular inanities of George the Third, with his determination to "be a king," are only just beginning to receive the weight they deserve. During the period of the "King's Friends" George III was, in fact, more of a despot than any English monarch since Elizabeth—the Stuarts included. Moreover, if his father had resolved to "be a king," George IV had resolved to "be a Regent," and he had fought Parliament on that question with as much success as was due to his inadequate personality.

The Victorians, however, inherited from the Whigs the tradition that the King was a nobody—that he had become a nobody in 1688, and had remained so ever since—both when he was a Dutchman fighting France for England's benefit, and when he was a German maintaining mistresses at England's expense. This tradition the Victorians felt safe—on quite inadequate grounds—in intensifying. They had read about the German Georges; the English Georges they remembered, one as a

lunatic and the other as a rake. William IV, for all his attempts at self-assertion, they were justified in disregarding. They were therefore free, from the beginning, to assume that the royal power was dead, and royalty itself no more than an ornament—in spite of their experience to the contrary within two years of the Queen's accession. They made the assumption, and they embodied it in their books—even in those text-books with which old lawyers are accustomed to confirm young ones in traditional errors. The law-books of the Victorians are full of assertions that Parliament is supreme, and the Crown merely subordinate—in an age when Parliament passed more than one bill which it detested, and more than one at the Queen's desire. The effect of such assertions was merely to strengthen erroneous ideas ; and one of the most erroneous of all was the idea that "Queen Victoria invariably accepted the decision of the country, as shown by a general election or a vote in the House of Commons."* That sort of statement is thoroughly Victorian in feeling, but it is also thoroughly wrongheaded. Victoria was never so self-effacing. She was as good as Queen Elizabeth in executing tactful retreats when she knew she was beaten; but at other times she was perfectly capable of fighting for what she wanted until she got it, and there are plenty of examples of her attempts to defy decisions both of the electorate and of the Commons. The notorious Bedchamber Question is one of the chief, though its unusual constitutional interest in another direction has fogged its real significance. It is too readily remembered that Peel was right about the ladies of the Bedchamber, and that the narrower

* Anson's "Law and Custom of the Constitution."

issue was settled in his favour a year or two later. It is too readily forgotten that despite this constitutional rebuff Queen Victoria did, in fact, get what she wanted—that she retained not only the ladies with whom Peel declined to serve, but the Prime Minister by whom the country had declined to be governed. The Bedchamber Question may have been fought about gentlewomen, but it settled the government. The first Parliamentary crisis of the reign disproves Anson's generalisation about the whole of it. It was Victoria's earliest opportunity of challenging Parliament's decision, and she took it.

That, of course, was not the immediate issue; but it is because the historians have seen too clearly the immediate issue of the question that they have lost its deeper importance. The Queen wanted Melbourne, and she did not want Peel; and if she chose, with sound feminine intuition, a ground for resistance which even lawyers found difficult to challenge, the result was the same. Melbourne stayed on, against the decision of Parliament, and only one other premier ever enjoyed his influence at Court. When his next defeat occurred, the Queen had a husband, as well as the experience which Melbourne had taught her; and Peel and all his successors were kept in their places till Albert died, and Disraeli became a sort of late-Victorian Melbourne.

The Bedchamber crisis, however, if the first, was by no means the only occasion when the Queen resisted the verdict of her subjects on the choice of premiers. At the best of times it is the Crown that determines which individual shall be asked to form a government when the last government has resigned, and if nowadays the royal choice is usually fixed by an electoral or Parliamentary vote, that was

not the case in mid-Victorian England. There were at least half-a-dozen parties, none of them with a majority over the rest, and with very little to choose between them in principle, from extreme right to extreme left. It was therefore easy for the Queen to play upon their mutual animosities, and matters were complicated by prevailing uncertainties about party leadership. Derby was presumably leader of the Conservatives—but possibly it ought to be Disraeli: Aberdeen was presumably leader of the Peelites—but possibly it ought to be Gladstone; and neither Russell nor Palmerston, nor the Whigs themselves, knew which of them was the leader of the Whigs.

In these circumstances the Queen had choice enough, and when she chose to be stubborn she had the chance to be very stubborn indeed. For this reason the 'fifties present themselves as a sort of running battle between Palmerston and the Court—a battle which the Queen eventually lost, but which at least enabled her to make a deal of difference to mid-Victorian politics. The causes of this estrangement are not our immediate concern, and they can be rapidly summarised by saying that whereas, under the influence of Albert, the Court was rapidly becoming Victorian, Palmerston remained obstinately Georgian in the carelessness with which he treated both public affairs and his own reputation. At the same time Palmerston was French in his sympathies, whereas the Queen and Prince Consort were Germans, with German aspirations as well as a German tongue. The quarter of a century which included both Prince Albert's residence in England and Palmerston's principal excursions in foreign politics was a period when French and German sympathies were irreconcil-

able. Hence the Queen's struggle against Palmerston had a double character: it was resistance both to an objectionable personality and to an objectionable policy.

The policy can wait till later. The point to notice here is that the personalities of politics, and therefore the politics themselves, were largely under the Queen's control. The 'fifties and 'sixties were the age of Palmerston's highest prestige in the country, and it was against the country's decision to have Palmerston in power that Victoria set her face. For ten years it is merely stroke and counter-stroke. Palmerston expressed approval of Louis Napoleon's *coup d'état* in 1851, when the Court was anxious not to approve anything French at all, and without consulting either the Queen or the Prime Minister. He was therefore sent packing, with instructions that foreign ministers must not be so independent. He promptly replied with his "tit-for-tat," which sent Russell packing in turn. The obvious thing was to send Palmerston to Downing Street, with a cabinet of some sort—possibly of all Whigs, possibly of Whigs and Peelites, and possibly even of Whigs and Tories; at any rate, a cabinet with Palmerston at the head of it. But the Court would have none of Palmerston, and the makeshift coalition under Aberdeen came into existence, with Palmerston in it to please the country, but away from the Foreign Office to please the Court.

Here again, the Queen had chosen the Prime Minister (as well as the Foreign Secretary) to suit herself, and against the wishes of the nation, which wanted Palmerston. The refusal of the Court to have Palmerston premier was responsible for the Aberdeen Coalition; and the Aberdeen Coalition was responsible for the Crimean War. That is at

least an interesting sidelight on the influence, not to say the power, of the Victorian Monarchy.

Meanwhile, the original duel continued. The government chosen by the Queen made such a muddle of the War that it went down in ignominy, and the united voice of country and Parliament cried aloud for Palmerston. His day was really come at last, but still the Queen refused to have him. She sought counsel on every hand, and even when all her friends told her that Palmerston was inevitable, she was foolish enough to try Russell instead in desperation, though she ought to have known that at that moment Russell was the last man on earth likely to get colleagues to support him. Still, it is the effort which is significant—the country wanted Palmerston, and she refused to accept the country's wishes so long as any alternative was available.

The final bout of this prolonged combat produced the same results. Derby's yearling ministry of 1858 gave the Queen a momentary respite from Palmerston, but next year the elections provided him with a comfortable majority. Again the Queen retreated stubbornly from ditch to ditch, staving off the inevitable surrender until the last possible moment. She sent for Lord Granville, who was sound and able enough, but who had no business to be in the running for the premiership. Granville invited both Palmerston and Russell to serve under him, and it was only Russell's conceited refusal to take a third place in politics which thwarted the Court design. Russell, however, refused; Granville had to give up the attempt; and Palmerston was premier for the rest of his life.

In short, of these fourteen years of struggle between Palmerston and the Monarchy, the first four years had gone in favour of the latter, while

the last ten had given Palmerston a definite victory. But whereas Palmerston died in 1865, Victoria lived to fight another day on the same issue. It is impossible to detail all her endeavours to control the choice of prime ministers, especially since her antipathy to Palmerston was succeeeded almost immediately by a similar antipathy for Gladstone. It was this which persuaded her in 1868 to keep Disraeli clinging by the teeth to office till the new electorate was ready to vote, instead of at once replacing him by Gladstone, whom the Commons had chosen. That, however, was no more than a passing advantage, and it was counterbalanced a dozen years later, when the Queen was reluctantly compelled to accept Gladstone, after an unsuccessful attempt (on the same lines as her resistance to Palmerston in 1859) to make Hartington premier instead.

Her luck was better when Gladstone's day was over. It was she who, in 1885, determined that Salisbury should be Prime Minister instead of Sir Stafford Northcote, and Salisbury lived to reap the fruits of her choice in two more ministries besides. Finally, it was she who gave the preference to Rosebery over Harcourt on Gladstone's final retirement, although Harcourt was the elder by nearly a generation.

There were, in short, at least seven occasions during the reign when the Queen interfered with the choice of a Prime Minister by purely " constitutional " methods, and in four cases out of the seven she was successful in securing her choice. No other individual in the reign had half as much influence in deciding the occupants of Downing Street, and it is at least questionable whether all the other estates—Lords, Commons, and Press together—

were not less powerful than the Monarchy in this particular direction. It is absurd, in fact, to treat the Crown as a nonentity when it is controlled by a personal force. Victoria was never, either at eighteen or at eighty, the woman to reign on sufferance. She knew her own mind; she was as stubborn as she cared to be; and despite the greater reputations which stand out from Victorian politics, those politics were rarely beyond her control. She initiated no great measures; the legislation of the reign is booked to the credit of subjects; but Peel, Palmerston, Russell, Gladstone and Disraeli notwithstanding, she probably influenced the politics of her reign more than any other single person.

. . . . . .

There was one exception—that of the personal force which controlled the Queen for the first twenty years of her reign, and which determined most of her prejudices, policies and methods for the rest of it. It is easy to ridicule the Prince Consort. Any man with a biography the size of his invites ridicule, and he has had his full share. He suffered, both in his lifetime and after his death, from a misunderstanding which was all but universal. He came in 1840 to an England seething with mistrust. As his years increased, the mistrust increased with them, until it culminated during the Crimean War in the monstrous persuasion that he was in league with the enemy, and had been sent to the Tower for treason. He committed against the Victorians the unpardonable sin of despising them, and he paid the penalty of general unpopularity. It was an age when the English were busy fostering the illusion of their own superiority to other peoples; and the other peoples added to a natural distaste for condescen-

sion the intellectual conviction that England was merely a wealthy and underhand fool. The twenty years of Albert's life here coincided roughly with the period of Palmerston's supremacy, and Palmerston's statesmanship invited both mistrust and contempt. The period was littered with examples of England's boastful and conceited incompetence—from the swaggering peroration of the *civis Romanus* to our ignominious backing-down over the Spanish marriages; from our failure against the Afghans to our success in beating Russia, after two years of muddled blunders, and with the help of three allies. It was a period spattered with broken promises, which stamped England deservedly as a dishonourable country, exercising a power undeniably great, but also undeniably immoral. The Continent was convinced that the perfidy of Albion was a permanent factor in European politics, and Prince Albert shared its conviction.

It was not as though England was frank in self-seeking, as Germany became later. Her ostentation of morality was at least as conspicuous as the immorality of her conduct. It was one of the traditions cultivated by the Victorians that England always said little and did much, whereas the Continent soon learned that it was safe to neglect both English protestations and English policy—small nations always excepted. England was willing to tackle wars with Afghans and Indians, but not with nations like Germany, capable of putting up a fight against her. Europe was safe, and Europe soon knew it. Victorian England failed throughout to realise that in Europe she was not so much disliked as despised.

This complacency was largely due, as Arnold never tired of teaching, to England's reluctance to hear any opinion but its own. The English convic-

tion of England's excellence was safe so long as none but Englishmen were consulted; and it was upon this rock that Albert's popularity broke in the country of his adoption. He was a German, like his wife, speaking and thinking habitually in the German tongue—and knowing besides more French than English. His views were naturally continental rather than insular, and the continental view of England was not congenial to Englishmen. He was a man of tact, and he did his best to conceal from England the deep contempt in which he held her. But feelings break easily through the barriers of words, and England felt subconsciously the scorn which was never spoken except to foreigners. Sympathy was absent, and in politics the absence of sympathy leads straight to dislike.

This antipathy which Albert shared with the whole of Europe was reinforced by one more particularly his own. He was essentially a man of action, and although he cannot be called a man of few words (his political memoranda would stock a library), his words were weighed and apposite, and they were governed by facts. To him it appeared that the facts of English politics were governed by words—words wasted in the House of Commons; and catchwords invented to explain, and then permitted to influence, the course of state affairs. He complained during the Crimean War that at a time of national crisis the politicians were sinking patriotism in their passion for party and for "Parliamentary dialectic;" and his attitude was always affected by this conviction of the necessity for more matter with less art in English politics. His methods were German—painstaking and conscientious, without losing sight of general principles; and he was desperately impatient, not only with the casual

carelessness of Palmerston in matters of the highest policy, and with the airy and ill-considered generalisations of Disraeli, but also with the merely academic meanderings which marked the political thought of Gladstone. In politics he stood alone, and his reputation suffered in consequence.

That, however, is not the sort of misunderstanding from which Prince Albert suffers in our own time. Nowadays his attitude to the English has been turned upon himself, and he is not so much disliked as despised—less hated as a surly foreigner than patronised as an amiable buffoon. To the Prince himself this would have seemed by far the more intolerable fate, but he has only his friends to blame. He had the misfortune to leave behind him a widow who behaved in the sight of the whole country as most widows behave in private, and the chivalrous sympathy of the nation in her grief merely caused her to make herself foolish. Statesmen followed her example with a fervour which seems proportioned to their natural cynicism. The Queen believed that the Prince had been perfect: and when Disraeli said, in so many words, that he was, the stone was set rolling which eventually tumbled Albert's reputation in an avalanche of ridicule. The opinions expressed in hasty letters of condolence were embodied permanently in stone: from the first English statue at Wolverhampton, where upon an impossible horse the Prince sits pouting an impossible chest (which repeats itself in plenty of paintings, but in none of his photographs), to the pan-artistic fantasias of Kensington, the country is spattered with eulogistic monstrosities which have done him unmerited harm. Posterity has forgotten that these are no more than the fruits of a widow's genuine grief, and has transferred to

the Prince a ridicule deserved only by his admirers and their artistic extravagances. If, instead of these caricatures, the Queen had rested content with a sober estimate of his real merits, she would have done greater service to his reputation. A man is not necessarily a fool because, when he is dead, his wife shirks her ceremonial duties, unveils grotesque memorials, and sleeps beside his portrait. To know Albert as he really was, we have to forget both the fulsome obituaries and the reaction which followed, and judge him anew by contemporary opinion and by his own actions.

There is no suggestion of the uxorious nincompoop in the opinions of those who knew him. Greville described him as "King to all intents and purposes," and this estimate of one who always said the worst of everybody is echoed by Disraeli, who always said the best when there was anything to gain by it. "With Prince Albert," he wrote to Count Vitzthum,

> "we have buried our Sovereign. This German Prince has governed England for twenty-one years with a wisdom and energy such as none of our kings has ever shown . . . . If he had outlived some of our 'old stagers,' he would have given us, while retaining all constitutional guarantees, the blessings of absolute government."

Except for the reservation of "constitutional guarantees," that is a pretty shrewd statement of the Prince's position. The "constitutional guarantees" were merely a concession to Victorian conviction that all good government was necessarily constitutional—a conviction which reappears in Tennyson's eulogy of Prince Albert, and provides all its point while at the same time making it worthless:—

"We know him now: all narrow jealousies

Are silent: and we see him as he moved,
How modest, kindly, all-accomplished, wise,
With what sublime repression of himself;
Not swaying to this faction, or to that;
Not making his high place the lawless perch
Of wing'd ambitions."*

And so on. This is the very false gallop of verses, and it contributed a good deal towards later misapprehensions of the Prince's character and aims. A man like that is not "King to all intents and purposes," nor successfully

"Laborious for her people and her poor,
Voice in the rich dawn of an ampler day,
Far-sighted summoner of War and Waste
To fruitful strifes and rivalries of peace—
Sweet nature gilded by the gracious gleam
Of letters, dear to Science, dear to Art."*

This is hardly consistent either with that "sublime repression of himself," or with what those thought of him who knew him best. His wife knew him hardly at all—she was too deep in love for that. But even she had good reason to know that his self-repression was merely superficial. He had tamed her into obedience (as he would, given time, have tamed the country), with a sureness not lessened by tact. What he actually achieved belies any sort of essential abnegation of himself; and what he achieved is nothing to what he planned.

No estimate of the Prince can pretend to justice which fails in full allowance of one significant fact—that he died at forty-two. At that age, of his contemporaries who have left a greater name, Palmerston had never been Foreign Secretary, Gladstone had never prepared a budget, and Disraeli had never

* Dedication to "Idylls of the King."

held office at all. Death came at a time when most men are just preparing to make their mark—and his was deeply scored already upon the fortunes of the nation.

It is natural enough for our generation to forget those aspects of the Prince's greatness which were purposely suppressed by his contemporaries; there is less excuse for ignoring those of which his contemporaries were most acutely aware. Kensington does more than it knows to belie his memory, by compelling the world, when it looks at the Albert Memorial, to turn its back on his real achievements. South Kensington itself is a truer memorial of the Prince, and *si monumentum requiris, circumspice* would be a better guide to his greatness than a gilded colossus receiving the homage of all the arts and sciences. The Albert Memorial, in fact, is a mere superfluity: the enormous group of buildings before it, the homes of half the sciences and arts, are themselves memorial enough of Albert's better-known work and aims.

He was, in fact, a Benevolent Despot in the making; and if his benevolence was more fully developed than his despotism, his premature death was the only cause. At any rate he made himself the foster-father of England's social fortunes, and even her political fortunes owed more to him than England cared to know. The Exhibition of 1851 stands out among his achievements because it was a novelty, and because it has left visible legacies to our own day. But even here the Prince has received less than due praise both for his original conception of industrial exhibitions, and for conducting his one exhibition with a financial success that may well turn later administrators green with envy. All this was in the middle of the century, when industrialism

was new, and Albert himself barely thirty. And the Great Exhibition was only one manifestation of his care for the country's economic welfare. He was as keen on agriculture as on industry, he tackled with some success the problem of sewage, and he promoted in an age of easy generalisation that statistical research without which no generalisation is possible, little as his contemporaries realised the fact.

In all these things he was ahead of his time, gently leading the blind along unaccustomed but more congenial paths. The same phenomenon is clearer still in his care for national culture. He was himself more broadly cultured than any English monarch, and his culture made effective inroads into the Philistinism of the Victorians. South Kensington is not only scientific because Albert was a scientist, but artistic because he was an artist; the site of its School of Art was bought with the proceeds of the Great Exhibition; and if Albert had had his way, South Kensington would have housed a greater National Gallery. As it is, the National Gallery is arranged in schools on a scheme originated by the Prince, and all the best galleries of London and the provinces have copied his plan. His aim was to popularise Art among the masses, and in his anxiety to make industry itself artistic, and Art one of the most important materials of education, he revealed himself as a monarchical Morris as well as a monarchical Ruskin, and anticipated a good deal that the twentieth century is still labouring to achieve.

He did as much and more for English musical taste. He was no mere figure-head on the artistic bodies with which he served; he was always in the van, and usually the leader. Instead of confining his patronage of the "Antient Concerts" and the "Philharmonic Society" to occasional attendance

at their functions, he moulded their policy for over twenty years. One of the results was, indeed, a mischievous preponderance of Mendelssohn—but it was usually Mendelssohn at his best, and even bad Mendelssohn was an improvement on Dibdin and Bishop and the other favourites of the early Victorians. And in any case, there was plenty of stronger fare — and, as usual with the Prince's artistic taste, as modern as the modernists could wish. It was at the Prince's suggestion that Mendelssohn himself, as well as Spohr and Wagner, conducted English concerts; that the Tannhauser overture was being popularised for concert purposes within ten years of its composition; and that a Schumann symphony was heard in England for the first time.

All this may seem a far cry from Victorian politics—but not from politics as Albert and the other Benevolent Despots conceived them. This care for the arts and sciences, and for economic progress, is a regular symptom of Benevolent Despotism, whether it is intended as a justification, or as a mere disguise. And in Albert's case there was need enough to conceal behind a curtain of social benefits his merely political ambitions. For his political ambitions were as definitely despotic as his social benevolence, and it was here that he carefully made most conspicuous that " sublime repression of himself " which the Victorians chanted over his corpse, but which they doubted with every justification during his lifetime. His Benevolent Despotism lacked nothing of the true eighteenth century character—if there were the same manifestations of method in social amelioration and artistic advance, there was the same underlying resolve that government should be, for the benefit of the people

indeed, but with as little of their interference as possible.

Even in the eighteenth century this "Idea of a Patriot King" found an obstacle in the English party system, and the King himself was compelled to become a party man, with his following of King's Friends. There was the same phenomenon in the time of Prince Albert. The party gyrations of the early 'fifties are due, in a large measure, to the Prince's determination to construct, if possible, a central party controlled by the Court. There was plenty of material in discontented Peelites and Whigs conscious that Whiggery was dead, and a genuine court party might have emerged from the confusion of party politics, if it had not failed to negotiate the Scylla of Gladstone's refusal to serve with Disraeli and the Charybdis of Palmerston's unpopularity at Court. As it was, the Aberdeen Coalition was itself largely the result of Court manœuvres, and that origin is reflected in the careful consignment of Palmerston to an office where he could exercise no control over foreign policy.

The Aberdeen Coalition was still acting as a makeshift for a Court Party when Stockmar produced, and the Prince endorsed in royal silence, his famous memorandum on the position of the English monarchy. It was enough, if it had been known, to alarm the worst fears of Victorian constitutionalism; and it coincides in time with the expression of those alarms in the papers. While the Court was more or less openly resenting the *Standard's* assertion of "improper and unconstitutional interference in public affairs" on the part of the Prince, Albert himself was quietly registering the opinion of his most trusted adviser that the English sovereign was to regard himself as "permanent

premier, who takes rank above the temporary head of the Cabinet, and in matters of discipline exercises supreme authority;" and that

> " as matters now stand, the necessary equilibrium of the Constitution can only be established and maintained by throwing a well-merited and deeply-seated popularity on the part of the Sovereign into the scale against the weight and pressure of that democratic element which has become so powerful in the House of Commons."

Language like this is anything but consistent with Gladstone's shallow summary of monarchical evolution in the nineteenth century as a " beneficial substitution of influence for power." In that kind of estimate, the wish is merely father to the thought, and it is typical of the blindness with which the power of the Victorian monarchy has been generally regarded. As compared with the Georges, it would be far truer to say that Albert and Victoria substituted influence for powerlessness, and that the influence, moreover, was very decidedly influential.

It is this reluctance of the Victorians to admit that their monarchy was only partially constitutional, which has led to the modern under-estimation of monarchical power in the time of Prince Albert. His greatness lay athwart the constitutional prejudices of the period, and it was therefore minimised alike by friends who dared not confess his power, and by enemies who, after his death, were willing enough to ignore the precedents he set. Before his death, his enemies showed considerably less equanimity. The sixth decade of the century saw national mistrust of Prince Albert at its height. It was the era of the great duel between Palmerston and the Prince, and that duel was not merely a conflict of personalities, but also a conflict of policies.

Not only was Palmerston supercilious and cavalier, as against the meticulous morality of Albertine Victorianism; he was also pro-French, whereas the Prince was pro-German. Hence the struggle between them was more than the merely constitutional affair which historians have represented it to be. In this, as in so many similar struggles before and since the time of Charles I, the constitutional issue was simply a means to an end. In the case of Charles I and his Parliaments, the end was money and the policies for which money could pay; in the case of Prince Albert and Palmerston the end was a specific foreign policy, rather than the control of foreign policy in general. The fight for the general control of foreign policy was a constitutional issue, and its result was of vast constitutional importance. But the parties were fighting less about the constitution than about politics. Palmerston wanted his own way, which was bad for Germany; Albert wanted his own way, which was bad for France; and both of them thought a good deal more about their own particular objects—just as Charles I's main concern was about his money-bags — than about the constitutional legacy they were leaving to their descendants.

For the Victorians of the 'fifties, Palmerston was the god in the car, and their hazy realisation that the god was being thwarted led to a by no means hazy distaste for the Court which was thwarting him. There were current the ridiculous rumours that the Prince was in the Tower for treason, and these were easily disproved; there were more sensible rumours that (to quote with Sir Theodore Martin from the papers which spread them) "our foreign policy was mainly directed by the Prince Consort," and these it was by no means easy to disprove.

Martin himself (who has spoilt a good example of biography in the grand manner by his anxiety to uphold the Prince's posthumous reputation for constitutionalism) wasted his energies in trying to rebut the charge, and his success is measured by the unmerited oblivion into which both his own book and the Prince's undoubted power have fallen. It is perfectly true, in fact, that for some years "our foreign policy was mainly directed by the Prince Consort," and in order to conceal this truth Martin had to paint him as a constitutional nobody, instead of the despot—always benevolent—which he aspired to be.

History has already forgotten that Prince Albert was a specialist, not primarily in industrial exhibitions, nor in symphony concerts, nor even in sewage, but in foreign policy; and it has also forgotten that this specialism of his was backed by an education in foreign politics as comprehensive as it was realistic. History has forgotten, in fact, that the Prince had any political importance at all, and it has made the mistakes which arise naturally from such a misconception. The years during which he was resident in England happen to be notorious for a succession of crises in the relations of the Crown with the Foreign Office, the responsibility for which is usually shared between Palmerston and the Queen. In fact, however, the coincidence is not merely chronological. Palmerston's quarrels with the Court were due not only to the personal distaste which he inspired by his manners and methods and objects, but to the fact that during those years the Prince Consort was consolidating for himself a position which threatened the Constitution much more violently than it threatened either Palmerston or his policies. The duel was not so much between the

Queen and her minister, as between Monarchy and Ministerial Responsibility—between the monarchical constitution conceived by Prince Albert's German intelligence, and the constitutional monarchy which had been evolved since the English Revolution.

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Albert came to England in 1840, and he died in 1861; the three decisive quarrels of the reign over the control of foreign policy took place in 1846, 1851, and 1859, with restive intervals between. The correspondence in these dates is too close to overlook; yet most historians have overlooked it. Its significance can hardly be exaggerated; it was a fifteen years war, with three vital campaigns, and it left upon the constitution ravages none the less real because Victorian constitutionalists failed to appreciate the constitutional development of their own age.

The first of these critical conflicts between the rival principles of monarchical and parliamentary control of foreign policy has had all the airing which public opinion usually demands for the dirty linen of politics. The affair of the Spanish Marriages combines all the fascinations of prime political importance and of the sexually sordid. Put briefly, the facts were these: Spain had a marriageable Queen with a marriageable sister; Louis Philippe was out for foreign alliances which would strengthen France's European position, but he dared not propose his son for the Spanish Queen, for fear of involving Europe in another War of the Spanish Succession. At the same time he was as determined as Louis XIV to put a French prince on the throne of Spain, and he therefore proposed a double alliance

which would have that ultimate result. His son he decided to marry to the eligible sister; for the Queen he picked, in the Duke of Cadiz, a husband notoriously incapable of having any children. The threat to England and to Europe was obvious, but England's interest was keener since Prince Albert's cousin had been proposed as an alternative husband for the Spanish Queen. Prince Albert was still young, and even fresher to this country than he was to diplomacy, so that both he and Victoria resolved to tread with wary feet; and they refrained with ostentation from pushing their cousin's claim. For this reason they were beside themselves with indignation when Palmerston blundered into the business with a despatch recommending the very Coburg candidature which the Court was so careful to disavow. Once more England stood branded before the Continent with a perfidy which was really due to her parliamentary institutions, but which appeared to foreigners merely the outcome of ingrained treachery. France replied — naturally enough—with an immediate consummation of the marriages she had proposed; and the Spanish throne seemed destined for a grandson of the King of France.

It was a position exactly the same as that which had precipitated war at the beginning of the eighteenth century, and for a long time the outlook was black. Nothing but the tact of Prince Albert and the Queen, and the reluctance of Palmerston ever to translate his diplomatic blustering into action (except against powerless foes), averted a catastrophe. War was, however, postponed for the moment, and a renewal of its probability was soon prevented by the birth to the Spanish Queen of her impossible heir.

None of his apologists, however, claimed on behalf of Palmerston any credit for this happy solution of the difficulty, and he remained in bad odour at the English Court. This bungling of his, in a diplomatic affair of the highest importance, was Albert's first experience of the fatuities which Palmerston was capable of perpetrating. When the Prince came to this country, Palmerston's reputation was one to respect: and it took the next six years to reveal that that reputation was, in fact, founded upon little more than a single diplomatic triumph, already fifteen years old, which Palmerston was never to repeat. English prestige was badly damaged by the diplomatic victory of France in this particular crisis, but the humiliation had at least this value, that it confirmed the Prince's (and therefore the Queen's) growing impression that English politicians in general, and Palmerston in particular, were made of a talkative but fairly negligible stuff. Albert was in his twenties, and Palmerston was over sixty; but Albert knew himself incapable of such folly as the Foreign Secretary had shown, and it was probably now that he began to feel towards the politicians of the day a superiority which heightened, during the Crimean War, into a barely disguised contempt.

Palmerston had, in fact, humiliated the country merely by being incompetent, and the fruits of his incompetence were only retrieved by the skilful assiduity of the Court in its diplomatic relations with the foreign monarchies. It was no bad start towards the Prince's political ambitions that he and the Queen were able successfully to counteract a diplomatic blunder of such magnitude on the part of the statesman who stood, more than any other, for the independence of the Foreign Office. Moreover, the lesson was merely driven home by Palmer-

ston's subsequent conduct. He was always fool enough to be unconscious of his own folly, and two years after his first Spanish fiasco he rushed into another which, if less vital in its implications, was even more openly humiliating. Full of his belief in himself as the dictator of Liberalism in Europe, he took upon himself to recommend more liberal courses to the Spanish Court in a despatch which merely secured the dismissal of the English ambassador from Madrid. Victoria was full of complaints of Palmerston's incapacity in managing her affairs and his own subordinates—"If our diplomatists are not kept in better order," she wrote to him, "the Queen may at any moment be exposed to similar insults;" but Palmerston was unabashed, and he continued his unheeding way into a personal autocracy in foreign policy which lacked even the one merit of most modern autocracies—that of being efficient.

Palmerston was, in fact, as careless as he was independent. His official papers were always in a lamentable condition, and his official conduct generally was conditioned by a casual *insouciance* like that of Melbourne, without Melbourne's saving determination to "let things alone." In these circumstances every fresh foolery of the Foreign Office was bound to irritate the punctilious nerves of the German behind the throne, and he was irritated no less by Palmerston's methods than by his policy. Palmerston retaliated by ignoring a Queen and her husband thirty-five years younger than himself, until the Court was threatened with absolute impotence in the one branch of policy over which no English monarch had ever relinquished formal control. The Teutonism of the first two Georges, and the insanity of the third, had veiled the fact

that the old struggle between the Stuarts and their Parliaments for the control of foreign policy had really been left undecided by the Revolution which had made William III king and left him to do as he liked with Louis XIV. Neither of the sons of George III was a man to stand up for his rights, and the issue was postponed until the middle of the century, when Victorian England was foolishly convinced that all such scores with its monarchy had been settled ages ago.

Prince Albert, in a word, went back behind the Revolution in his conception of English kingship. The principles of Stockmar's Memorandum of 1854, which has already been quoted, were simmering in his and the Prince's minds long before they were written down, and it appeared to both of them that Palmerston was an easy quintain at which to tilt. The more cavalier his methods, the better the Prince's opportunity, and in 1850—the facts are too notorious to need repetition—the Queen told the Foreign Secretary (not for the first time, but more categorically than ever before) that he must come to heel or be punished:—

> "She requires (1) that he (the Foreign Secretary) will distinctly state what he proposes in a given case, in order that the Queen may know as distinctly to *what* she has given her royal sanction.
>
> (2) Having *once given* her sanction to a measure, that it be not arbitrarily altered or modified by the Minister; such an act she must consider as failing in sincerity towards the Crown, and justly to be visited by exercise of her Constitutional right of dismissing that minister."

For the moment Palmerston bowed before the storm, but in the next year he bobbed up again

with all his former volatility, by recognising the French *Coup d'Etat* without consulting either the Queen or the Cabinet. It was the last straw, and it broke the back of Palmerston's influence on foreign policy for the next four years.

Two points of significance emerge from Palmerston's humiliation. On his expulsion from office, he complained that he was the victim of a woman in a temper, and posterity has been inclined to agree with him. In fact, however, he was nothing of the sort ; the Queen's letter to Russell in 1850 was not written in a temper ; and for that matter it was not written by a woman. It embodies, with hardly a verbal change, a memorandum composed five months previously—and five months is plenty of time for a temper to cool. More important still, the author of that memorandum was Stockmar, and its spirit was that spirit of German absolutism with which both Stockmar and the Prince were filled.* It was, indeed, the forerunner of that more comprehensive memorandum of four years later, in which, with the Prince's approval, Stockmar claimed for the English monarchy the right to " take a part in the initiation and the maturing of the Government measures," with " the position of a permanent Premier, who takes rank above the temporary head of the Cabinet [who " is and can be nothing else

* It is worth while to set down Stockmar's words for comparison with those signed by the Queen (cf. p. 250 above):

" The least the Queen has a right to require of her minister is:

1. That he will distinctly state what he proposes in a given case, in order that the Queen may know as distinctly to what she has to give her royal sanction.

2. Having given once her sanction to a measure, the Minister, who, in the execution of such measure alters or modifies it arbitrarily, commits an act of dishonesty towards the Crown, which the Queen has an undoubted constitutional right to visit with the dismissal of that Minister."

(Queen Victoria's Letters—12th March, 1850.)

but the Chief of the Party then in power "], and in matters of discipline exercises supreme authority."

"I heartily agree with every word you say," replied Prince Albert, so that the attitude of both of them is clear enough.

Palmerston's dismissal, however, was not merely a successful strategic move in the Prince's march towards controlling foreign policy : it was an official registration of his right to such control. By the theory of the constitution, Parliamentary control of the executive is only exercised by the expulsion of offending ministers from power. On this occasion the same function had been discharged by the Court; and it was an obvious constitutional inference that the Court was at least the equal of the Legislature in its relations with the Cabinet. That conclusion, of course, runs directly counter to those Whig principles of the Revolution Settlement upon which Victorian England based its conviction that the Monarchy had lost all political power. The Victorians believed themselves to be governed entirely by Parliament ; their Monarchy they conceived as no more than a ceremonial adjunct to the constitution ; and they continued to cherish that belief even after the Court had openly exercised a power, which in theory it did not possess, to dismiss the most popular politician in the country.

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If the significance of this crisis had escaped the nation, and even the Premier who had condoned and assisted the Court in its triumph, the Court itself was more aware of what was implied. Russell as Prime Minister had been the catspaw of the Court in this assertion of its control over the Government, and it needed no more than a repetition of his

complaisance to provide the Court with definite confirmation of its powers. This confirmation Russell signed, sealed, and delivered in writing, when he was himself Foreign Secretary under Palmerston in 1859. The intervening eight years had seen the ignominious failure of a Court ministry under Aberdeen, the endorsement by Prince Albert of Stockmar's charter of absolutism, and Palmerston's apparently triumphant progress to power. Yet Monarchy and Cabinet were still struggling for the supreme control of foreign policy. In the early 'fifties, Palmerston had at least made a fight for it: in the later 'fifties, Russell virtually conceded the whole position, without so much as a resignation to save appearances.

Or rather, Russell was pre-occupied with the wrong appearances. As before, there were two issues at stake—a specific line of policy, and the weightier matter of the law and custom of the constitution. In 1851, the question was whether the country should follow Palmerston into approval of Louis Napoleon, or follow the Queen in ignoring him ; and behind this was the wider question whether the ultimate control of foreign policy should be held by the Court or the Cabinet. Palmerston carried his policy, but he lost his office, and by so doing he yielded to the Court on constitutional grounds a victory which had fallen to himself on the narrower ground of politics. In 1859 the position was very similar. The issue was now whether Italy should receive support or apathy from England in her struggle with Austria. Palmerston and Russell, who in 1851 had been Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister, and who were now Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary respectively, were as liberal in their policy as ever, while the Court was not a whit

less autocratic. History therefore repeats itself with a parallelism simply deadly for the Parliamentarians, who stuck stubbornly to their guns when they would have done much better to sally out against the enemy's position. Russell in particular was so full of himself that concession was always distasteful, and having determined that English sympathies were to be definitely Italian, he refused to recede. As usual, the Court was German, and therefore anxious to do nothing that might agitate Austria. Here was the clash of policy which concealed from contemporary eyes the deeper issue behind. Russell's despatches were naturally disliked by the Queen, and she insisted on their alteration. Backed by Palmerston (who ought to have had more sense) Russell took refuge in cunning, and made verbal changes without affecting the real meaning of the most objectionable despatch, which the Queen returned for revision over and over again. Each time the words were altered at her command, without meeting her wishes, and while time was wasted in the consequent bickering between Court and Cabinet, the ministry succeeded in making their own views prevail on the Continent, with the result that Austria, cowed by the apparent inability of Victoria to assert her wishes, accepted the Peace of Villafranca.

Thus the ministry had secured against the monarchy a political victory as decisive as that of Palmerston in recognising Louis Napoleon. The Liberalism of the Foreign Office had again forestalled on the Continent the absolutism of the Court —but at the price of a constitutional surrender at home as deadly as that of 1851. Russell and Palmerston had achieved their immediate object only through an unofficial diplomacy which was

masked by their nominal if transparent obedience to the official commands of the Queen. If in one sense their obstructionist tactics in making merely verbal changes in despatches had succeeded in wearing down the Court to the acceptance of a *fait accompli,* in another sense their acceptance of the Court's rebukes was their own undoing. Every change they made in their wording, however slight and however ineffective, was in fact a precedent in favour of the control of foreign policy by the monarchy—an official acquiescence in the right of the Queen to regulate by veto the country's relations with foreign powers.

Russell, however, had gone further than this. It was Russell, with his innate tendencies towards a loyalty always sycophantic, whom the Court had used as its tool in the constitutional victory over Palmerston, and it was he who again played into its hands. Victorian politicians were always too liberal of their words, and Russell's readiness to make verbal concessions to the Queen, so long as his immediate political object was attained, surrendered to her the whole constitutional position. The proof of this constitutional heresy lies open on the pages of their official correspondence, and a comparison of the Queen's demands with Russell's concession throws upon the real power of the Victorian Monarchy a light which only Victorian complacency could have disregarded. "She must refer," wrote the Queen,

> "to the constitutional position of Ministers towards herself. They are responsible for the advice they gave her, but they are bound fully, respectfully and openly to place before her the grounds and reasons upon which their advice may be

founded, to enable her to judge *whether she can give her assent to that advice or not.*"

Here is a specific claim to exercise, like Parliament, a control of policy by veto, and to exercise it, not merely, as in 1851, by an occasional ostentatious dismissal of a minister, but in the ordinary course of administration ; to compel the adoption of Court policies by refusing (as Derby had already complained) to sanction any other. It was the assertion of ultimate autocracy ; yet Russell, too busy about Italian affairs to notice the injury he was inflicting on English constitutionalism, answered the Queen in words that may stand as the charter of monarchical liberties. He claims, indeed, that a minister may please himself what advice he gives to the Crown ; he mentions ministerial responsibility to Parliament ; and then he adds with a naif surrender of the essentials of the constitution as he ought to have understood it :—

" It will always be in Your Majesty's power to reject it altogether."

No fuller acknowledgment could have been made of the Court claim to an ultimate control of foreign policy—and, in fact, of the general policy, domestic as well as foreign, of any government. And if Russell was the only minister capable of surrendering the constitutional position with such shortsightedness, that was merely a misfortune for the constitutionalists, since the surrender was as complete, and—which is more important—as official, as if it had been made by the most sophisticated of all the Victorians.

Thus the last government of the Whigs, whose gospel was the Revolution Settlement, bequeathed to their heirs a badly mortgaged constitutional legacy. Twice in the 'fifties Palmerston and Russell

had been betrayed by their political myopia into surrender to an encroaching monarchy. If, instead of tacitly ignoring as long as they dared the Queen's claim to control their actions, they had forced the fight into the open and gone to the country about the whole question, they would have done better service to their successors. The electorate would have backed Palmerston against anybody—certainly against the Queen ; in 1851 it would willingly have backed him, even if it had believed him wrong ; in 1859 it was convinced he was right, and its backing would have been all the stronger. Instead, the ministers maintained the convention that the Queen could do no wrong, and that, even if she did, it must be hushed up. Consequently they blundered into these vital precedents in favour of monarchical power, in that domain of foreign policy where monarchical pretensions had always been so considerable, and they therefore left to the ministers who followed them a difficulty which time did nothing to resolve.

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For as time went on, while Victoria merely grew older, Russell grew more senile, and Palmerston died altogether. Moreover, Prince Albert died before Palmerston, and those suspicions of autocratic designs which had fed national distrust of the scheming and industrious Consort, could hardly be entertained of the tearful widow who only had time to mourn his loss. Chivalry demanded that the Queen should be trusted, and Victorian England was always ready to be ostentatiously chivalrous, without realising that even queens are women enough to turn chivalry to their own ends. Besides, Victoria was now as old as many of the principal

politicians, with a good deal more political experience than they ; and every year saw her comparative experience increase with her comparative age, until Disraeli was forced to scorn the pretension that the Queen was powerless, by declaring frankly that

> "a man who would venture to treat such influence with indifference would not be a Constitutional Minister, but an arrogant idiot."

English constitutionalism soon found, in fact, that a Queen with a dead husband was a good deal harder to manage than a Queen with a live one, since dead men's opinions are not easy to change. The absolutist aims of the Prince Consort had been carefully conceived, and Albert himself always had the sense to see when concession was profitable. After his death, Victoria's absolutism was considerably stiffened by her belief that concession, even when profitable, was foreign to Albert's nature: and when on occasion she remembered to be despotic, she was very despotic indeed.

In this, as in so much besides, the Queen failed hopelessly to appreciate her husband's psychology and methods. Albert knew when to hold back as well as when to advance, and if his strategics of steady attrition had been disturbed by occasional intensive bombardments of the constitutional trenches, those trenches had really been carried by his patient waiting for fifteen or twenty years. When he was gone, Victoria remembered only the bombardments, and forgot the dreary years which had been spent in the monarchical dug-out. Moreover, Albert passed with a flourish that lent colour to the Queen's misconceptions. "The last thing he ever wrote" was a revision of a despatch to North America about the affair of the *Trent*, and it is highly probable that war was averted through

his substitution of princely tact for Palmerstonian bluster. It was a fitting crown to the Prince's previous interventions between Palmerston and war with France, and to the mind of the Queen it set the seal upon his career as a benevolent despot. A fortnight later he was dead, and the country was left at the mercy of a widow determined to follow in his paths, whose despotism was based upon constitutional precedent, but whose benevolence was arbitrary and capricious.

The twenty-one years of the Prince's life in England form, in fact, a distinct phase in the history of English royalty. It is true that "what *he* would have done" became the keynote of the Queen's subsequent conduct—that her husband's spirit ruled her actions after his death. But the spirit was transmuted by her own individuality, which was at once less cautious and less consistent than his. She was a woman, and that made all the difference. The Prince's actions had been units in a larger whole, details in a general policy of developing the royal power. Queen Victoria approached her duties as a woman naturally would ; she was as conscientious as Prince Albert, but she was capricious ; she worked as hard as he, but without his continuity of aim. She tackled her problems separately, with all the fervour of female fidelity to an ideal, but without that wider practicability of purpose which is better supplied by a man. She was wholly wanting in that intense realism which had led Albert to despise the word-mongering politicians with whom his lot was cast, and she replaced it by that peculiarly Victorian idealism which can only be described, in a Victorian word, as "bunkum." Realism in monarchical politics was superseded by an absurd convention, and its absurdity grew into monstrous proportions as

Victoria advanced towards the self-centred querulousness of middle-aged womanhood. For the rest of the reign, Court claims were unabated, and they were reinforced by the Queen's widening experience. But they were based upon no consciousness of a policy preconceived, and they were discounted by the caprice with which the Queen preferred them. The steady push of determined purpose was lost in a despotism which revealed itself only in occasional and unpremeditated actions.

This comparative aimlessness of Court policy after the Prince's death is perhaps best illustrated by statistics. In the last fifteen years of his life, Prince Albert kept England from war no fewer than four times—over the Spanish marriages ; over Louis Napoleon's *coup d'état ;* over the Italian struggle for independence in 1859 ; and two years later, over the affair of the *Trent.* To these victories of peace has to be added his very considerable share in winning the Crimean War. His average works out at one cardinal diplomatic intervention in every three years. After his death, the average of the Queen, during the remaining forty years of her life, was one in thirteen years ; and to reach even this figure we are compelled to count her very questionable influence in avoiding war with Germany in 1896—at the time of the Jameson Raid—and in 1899, during the Boer War. With these two exceptions, her single diplomatic triumph on her husband's model was within three years of his death, while his example was still fresh in her memory.

On this occasion, moreover, her diplomacy was anything but Albertine in its results, whatever it was in conception and execution. England had virtually promised, by the mouths of Russell and Palmerston, to help Denmark against Prussia, and

we had pointed the promise by marrying the Prince of Wales, in 1863, to a Danish princess. Queen Victoria had taken no part in the ceremony—ostensibly, and no doubt truly, because her two-year-old bereavement dictated seclusion; but whatever the Queen's real motive for keeping in the background, her action was capable of construction on the Continent as due to the desire of avoiding offence to Prussia, with whom Denmark's relations were already strained. At any rate, when war broke out and the English Cabinet prepared to fulfil its undertakings, Victoria made it perfectly plain that she would stand no anti-German nonsense. The Queen's speech for the opening of Parliament in 1864 left the prime minister's hands with a hint of hostilities to come. The Queen erased the hint and forbade the policy it foreshadowed. For the last time Palmerston came to heel ; the policy of the Court prevailed over the policy of the Cabinet ; and Denmark, left unexpectedly in the lurch, gave up Schleswig and Holstein to Germany.

The Queen's achievement was carried out on a scale worthy of the Prince Consort. But instead of rectifying, as his interventions had done, the follies of Foreign Ministers, and decreasing the dislike with which England was regarded abroad, her action merely dotted the i's and crossed the t's of Europe's conviction of the perfidy of Albion. And besides that immediate result, it saddled the Continent, and England most of all, with the peculiar problems which could only arise when Germany had planted her foot in the Danish peninsula, and determined to make a seaway through it. The intervention of the Queen was based upon her German sympathies, with little or no regard to the ultimate consequences ; and she must share with others the

responsibility for our later relations with the country from which she sprang and whose language she spoke.

This was the last occasion but one when the Queen interfered decisively in foreign affairs. Eleven years later she helped the Czar to prevent a renewal of the Franco-German War : thereafter, the rest was silence. That is not, however, to say that her energies were abated. The older she grew, the more energetic she became; only her energies were increasingly administrative, without the inspiration of continuous policy. She worked like a slave ; she saw, and signed with her own hand, every Foreign Office despatch—and there were 28,000 in one year ; an average of seventy-six a day. In addition, she kept a hand upon the wheel of the country's policy in general. But all the time she was tending to become a mere salaried clerk, except when she chose, on occasion and without any ultimate aim, to assert herself. She was a woman, working hard, but without a man to direct her purpose.

For a time, indeed, she found her director in Disraeli ; and their more than friendly relations recall the more positive and probably less spiritual co-operation of Mazarin with Anne of Austria. At all events, under the spell of a personal magnetism which Disraeli never scrupled to wield—he "laid it on with a trowel" when he was dealing with her—Victoria diverted her governmental energies into those imperial channels which Disraeli was carving out for himself. She accepted at his hands the Imperial Crown of India, which, whatever its effects in the East, raised the English monarchy to a titular rank as high as that of any other in Europe. She followed Disraeli at the same time,

and in pursuance of the same imperial policy, to the verge of war with Russia : and if she could have had her way, she would have pushed him over the brink, and Berlin would have known nothing of the sweets of "Peace with Honour." A year or two later she was urging more desperate measures against the Zulus, and in particular moving heaven and earth, and everything but Disraeli, in an attempt to replace Wolseley by a commander-in-chief more to her taste. She failed, because Disraeli was never at a loss for the soft answer which turned away her wrath, but when Gladstone took his place she let herself go,* and if she had been able to carry her policy against that of the Liberals, the latter would never have damned themselves, as they did, by that series of imperial disgraces, from Majuba to Khartoum, which contributed so largely to their downfall.

In all these things, however, she failed—partly because Gladstone was as stubborn as herself ; partly because her imperialism was that of Disraeli —an exotic plant which died with its protector, to make room for the hardier growth planted by Chamberlain. The enormous wreath which she placed on Disraeli's tomb marked the passing of a colleague as well as a friend and a servant ; the days were done when a premier would be willing to "treat the government of the country as a kind of partnership between the Sovereign and the Minister." †

Thus it may be said that, on the whole, Victoria lost for the Monarchy that definite control over foreign policy which the Prince Consort had ac-

* In one day, for example, she wrote to the War Office seventeen letters about its conduct of the Zulu War.

† Monypenny and Buckle, *Life of Disraeli*, Vol. VI., p. 453.

quired. In her widowhood she was, in fact, more English and less German than she had been with Albert, and her cultivated seclusion served to heighten the tendency to ignore foreign affairs. At the same time she needed an outlet for her recurrent fits of self-assertion, and it is consequently in domestic affairs that the symptoms of latent autocracy are most easily seen.

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Strangely—or naturally—enough, the Queen's first cardinal interference in domestic affairs was, from her own point of view, a matter of foreign policy; it failed as signally as her interference against Denmark had succeeded, because whereas, in the latter case, hot sympathies of the Queen were opposed to the tepid sympathies of the ministry, she was now opposing her own hot sympathies on behalf of Germany against equally hot sympathies of the Government in favour of reform. In the case of Denmark, she had carried her wishes against the country as well as the cabinet; in the matter of reform, the country in 1866 was as apathetic as the Queen; yet the ministry carried its wishes against them both—and incurred the due nemesis of its own destruction.

The position was this; Austria and Prussia were tearing one another's throats for the leadership of Germany, and Victoria's Teutonic heart was riven with every wound inflicted upon her husband's fatherland. To her it appeared monstrous that Russell should spend himself in performing unnecessary constitutional operations upon an unwilling electorate, while Germany lay bleeding to death with internal hæmorrhage, and more monstrous still that he should resign at such a crisis in

Germany's affairs, merely because the English House of Commons had voted against his reform bill.

> "In the present state of Europe," she wrote, "the Queen cannot think it consistent with the duty which the Ministers owe to herself and the country that they should abandon their posts in consequence of their defeat on a matter of detail (not of principle) in a question which can never be settled unless all sides are prepared to make concessions."

The "matter of detail (not of principle)" was to have crowned the career of Lord John Reformer, and he told the Queen frankly that he should bow to a constitutional usage stronger than all the commands of royalty. Victoria was thoroughly annoyed, but she was compelled to accept Russell's decision, and he was never in office again. If he had been as complaisant now in his concessions to the prerogative as he had been in 1859, he would have remained Prime Minister until Austria was beaten, and he would probably have achieved the reputation he deserved to gain as the father of two reform acts. But the policy of the Queen was shelved, and the second reform, instead of confirming Russell's reputation as a reformer, merely confirmed Disraeli's reputation as a charlatan. Even the Prince Consort could have wished for no better proof that English politicians were the slaves of constitutional theory, and that the only realism in English politics was to be found at Court.

It would be useless to prepare a catalogue of the Queen's sporadic excursions into autocracy during the forty years of her widowhood. Some provinces —especially the Army and the Church—she attempted to make her own, but she was too casual

in her methods to succeed with either. The later years of her reign saw a continuous diminution in the royal control of the Army, and the Queen was openly defeated by Gladstone in her efforts to retain the purchase of commissions. In the case of the Church, failure was perhaps less obvious, but certainly no less real. Her only contribution of importance was her successful advocacy of the Public Worship Act in 1874—an act which may have been due, as Disraeli told her, mainly to the initiative of the Queen, but which certainly remained a dead letter with no practical effect at all; and for the rest of the reign she was manifestly impotent against the rising tide of an Anglo-Catholicism which she detested.

In these later years there was, in fact, a reversion to that substitution of influence for power which Gladstone endeavoured to see in the whole of the reign. The Queen was living on her reputation as a potential autocrat, and neither she nor the politicians realised that that reputation was based upon the personal ability of a man who had died in the early 'sixties. Consequently, a good deal was said about the power of the Queen, when it suited the politicians to say it. Disraeli it often suited, since he knew how to manage the Queen, and could get out of her most of the things he wanted, and it was only natural that his gratitude should find expression in the notorious panegyric which he uttered at Hughenden in 1871:—

> "No person likely to administer the affairs of this country would treat the suggestions of Her Majesty with indifference, for at this moment there is probably no person living in this country who has such complete control over the political traditions of England as the Sovereign herself—

> there is no person who can advise Her Majesty, who can have such a complete mastery of what has occurred in this country, and of all the great and important affairs of State, foreign and domestic, for the last thirty-four years, as the Queen herself. He, therefore, would not be a wise man who would not profit by Her Majesty's judgment and experience. . . . There never was a Sovereign more jealous, or more wisely jealous, of the prerogatives which the Constitution has allotted to her, because she believes they are for the welfare of her people."

The tone of the whole speech is one of deference to greater experience, and that was the real basis of Victoria's power at the end of her reign. Throughout the period of her unpopularity in the 'seventies, and the ridiculous reaction to an unreasoning adulation at the end of the reign, she usually had her way when she wanted it, because there was no man who dare thwart her. On two occasions, indeed, Gladstone showed that she could be opposed with success—when he abolished purchase in the Army, and when he introduced Home Rule. But his attitude to the Queen was always spiced with fear, and the nervous qualms which he always entertained of his reception at the Palace are enough to justify the wildest rumours of similar nervousness on the part of the Prince of Wales.

All this, however, was no more than cowardice in breaking through the accumulated tradition that the Queen was a martinet. If Gladstone stood up to her twice, other statesmen could have repeated the performance, but that none of them felt equal to bearding her in her den of prerogative. Benevolent despotism had passed with the Prince Consort: the despotism of his widow was less consistent, and

a good deal less benevolent. Her power was not constitutional (as his would have been had he lived to complete it), but personal, and her two most important contributions to the political history of these forty years are, in fact, based upon her personal influence rather than upon her constitutional powers.

In both cases her immediate object was to avert a clash between Lords and Commons. She had the sense to see that in a self-consciously democratic age any such conflict would be damaging to the Lords, and the Lords were far too valuable a buffer between Monarchy and the people for Victoria to acquiesce in any reduction of their powers. This was her reason for interfering when the Upper House threatened to throw itself over the precipice of opposition to Irish Disestablishment. The Commons had been elected for the specific purpose of disestablishing the Irish Church, and when the Lords looked like opposition to the death, Queen Victoria was one of the first to realise upon whom death would fall. She consequently moved earth and heaven (through their respective agents in the flesh, Gladstone and the Archbishop of Canterbury) in an effort for compromise. She succeeded; the Lords withdrew their opposition; and constitutional historians were left with a splendid example of the Queen's determination to accept the declared decisions of the electorate. Enough has already been said about that sort of generalisation; the Court under Victoria could be quite as immovable by decisions of the electorate as the Court under Albert. But in this particular case there is added illumination in the fact that the interests of Court and electorate were one. The people wanted the bill to pass because they desired Disestablishment.

Victoria wanted it to pass because she desired the Lords to remain as one of her bulwarks. And so she waived her own predilections in favour of establishment, and behaved in spite of these predilections as a constitutional monarch should—because it suited her.

It is more to the point to realise that, however magnanimously the Queen was waiving her predilections, she was at the same time exercising that veiled prerogative which lay behind the power of the Victorian Monarchy. The Lords were prepared to fight to a finish, and their capitulation was secured, not by the will of the people expressed at a general election, but by the will of the Queen expressed in private. But for the influence which she exercised so effectively, the crisis of the struggle between Lords and Commons would have been precipitated into the middle of the nineteenth century, instead of waiting as it did until the twentieth.

The strength of the Victorian Monarchy in comparison with that of its successors as well as its predecessors is, in fact, best illustrated by its share in averting this particular constitutional duel. The phenomenon of 1869 recurred fifteen years later, when Salisbury was leading both the Lords and the Conservative Party into blank resistance to the third Reform Bill. This time there was no recent election to justify the Liberal proposal, but Gladstone was determined to get himself associated with a Reform Act, and both sides faced one another with open intransigeance. Again the Queen put forth her mediating hand: Salisbury and Northcote met Gladstone and Hartington (with Dilke holding a watching brief for the Radicals) in a round-table conference, wholly at the Queen's suggestion; and in consequence a compromise was effected which

satisfied Liberals, Conservatives and Monarchy alike—at the trifling cost of nullifying, to a great extent, the effects for which the whole reform had been designed. Here again the settlement was due to regal intervention; if the first Victorian reform was a leap in the dark, the second was a compromise under the patronage of the Court.

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Thus the merely constitutional theory of the English Monarchy, which prevails in all the text-books, is simply untrue of the Monarchy under Victoria. She began as a girl in her teens, with all the weakness of maidenhood—and all its strength; she ended as an octogenarian, and her faculties failed her only with the century to which she belonged. Within two years of her accession she rejected the chosen ministry of the people and retained her own, and in this particular direction never loosened her prerogative. Marriage provided her with the partner and the policy to confirm her own determination, and during the lifetime of the Prince Consort there was deliberate aiming at enlightened autocracy. The Prince's achievement was considerable, and he promised more than he achieved. His policy died with him, but there survived the prestige to which he had raised the Monarchy, with the result that the later period of mid-Victorianism witnessed a reaction to an almost romantic culture of the monarchical tradition. The absolutism of Albert's dreams faded into thin air, but it was replaced by a loyalty to the Queen which served her quite as well. Monarchical prestige—as distinct from monarchical power—reached its zenith under Disraeli, who combined with Oriental notions of royal splendour the power to use the Queen for his

own ends. By him the power of the Crown was deliberately magnified; if Russell's letter to the Queen during the Italian crisis of 1859 had conceded control to the Monarchy by implication, Disraeli went further and conceded it in so many words by describing the Monarchy as

> "limited by the *co-ordinate* authority of the Estates of the Realm, but limited by nothing else."

In no other reign since the Revolution have two responsible ministers given such unanimous testimony to the power of the Crown as to assert, the one that it holds ultimate control over our foreign policy, and the other that it possesses, in constitutional law and custom, a power co-ordinate with that of the Houses of Parliament.

After Disraeli, decline was inevitable. Gladstone the Queen had always disliked, and with younger men—even with Salisbury, who, up to a point, was congenial enough—she had no real sympathy. The tide of Victorianism had in fact receded, and had left her withering upon the shore. So long as she lived, her prestige remained, and it was galvanised into artificial vigour by a couple of jubilees. But by fostering her personal power, she had doomed the power of the Monarchy. Much of her later years was spent in a tussle with ministers who wished her to delegate some responsibility to the Prince of Wales. The Prince of Wales, however, she did not trust, and Edward VII came to the throne in consequence with less experience than he needed. Albert would have known better than that; but Victoria was feminine enough to disregard the implications of her selfish clinging to authority. If much of her power in later years was based on the

country's chivalry to her womanhood, the crumbling of that power as it fell from her hands was mainly due to her inability to act otherwise than a woman naturally would.

VIII. The Evolution of Parties

"It is the nature of parties to retain their original enmities far more firmly than their original principles." (*Macaulay*, Essay on Chatham).

OUR present party system is an article of purely Victorian manufacture. At the beginning of the reign, there were parties, but no party system in the modern sense, and the parties were not those of to-day. In 1837 there were Whigs and Tories—no more; in 1901 there were neither Whigs nor Tories, but Liberals and Conservatives, with an Irish Party in abeyance, and a Labour Party trying to find its feet: and neither Liberals nor Conservatives were either Whig or Tory, by descent or by sympathy. It was the Victorians who destroyed both Whiggery and Toryism, and they replaced those time-worn loyalties by others of their own invention. Liberalism and Conservatism were an expression of Victorian political ideals, and an examination of their origins sheds an interesting light on the character of their creators.

There had been plenty of indications, before 1837, that for all practical purposes the old parties were dead. Whigs and Tories were the agents of the eighteenth century for voicing its own principles, and those principles were threadbare before the eighteenth century was over. The Whigs were men of 1688, who stood for the principles of the Glorious Revolution; the Tories were driven by the force of their impossible loyalty into sympathy with the continental epidemic of despotism which was benevolent when benevolence appeared congenial. King or Parliament — the cleavage was quite

definite, and everybody knew where it was. But a century of the Revolution had dimmed its glory; in the later years of the eighteenth century Whigs were not sure that it had gone far enough, and Tories were certain that it had not gone too far. The Whiggery of conservative Whigs like Burke combined with the Toryism of enlightened Tories like the younger Pitt to demonstrate that there remained no essential differences between the parties; and it needed only the French Revolution to scatter their alignment. Revolution Whiggery died with Burke at the end of the century; if some Whigs lingered to support the name, they were either Radicals with Fox and Russell, or mere survivals with Palmerston of a day that was dead. In 1783 there was a coalition of Whigs and Tories which contemporary opinion could still decry as immoral; a generation later coalition meant simply the co-operation of all the talents in a common cause.

With peace, came leisure to readjust the political situation, and with leisure, the conviction that the old order had gone. Whigs were anxious to sink in reform the constitution which Whiggery regarded as sacred, and Tories found themselves powerless to resist. Canning in power realised that he was not merely a Tory, and only his premature death prevented the formation of a middle party which might have solved all the perplexities of Gladstone's political pilgrimage. The first Reform Act was passed, and endorsed by the official manifesto of the Tory party, which thus accepted the new electorate as it was already beginning to accept the new economics of Free Trade. All this was making clear the absence of issue between the Whigs and the Tories, before ever Victoria left her adolescent seclusion at Kensington; and yet her reign began with the same

two parties which had held the political field for a century and a half. Not till the Victorians applied the touch of their inborn realism did the hollow shells of the two dead parties crumble in belated collapse. It is that which stands to the credit of Victorian party politics. They faced the fact that their inherited antagonisms were at bottom unreal, and they frankly abandoned them—but only to put in their places other antagonisms which, if not unreal, were at least unworthy and evanescent.

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The early history of Victorian Toryism needs no repetition. It is trodden ground, and in any case nothing but chronology entitles it to be called Victorian. The position will perhaps be put as clearly as need be, if it is said that the Tory party of 1837 included both Disraeli and Gladstone—a Disraeli and a Gladstone, it is true, who were mere embryos of their later selves, but embryos with the lines of their divergent development already predetermined. The only alternative to the Tories was the Whigs—men like Palmerston and Russell—and beyond that, nothing. There was no cleavage of principle; both believed in the accomplished Reform; neither believed in Free Trade; the political pendulum was swaying only with the final tremors of an impulse which had long since passed away. Then Peel became Prime Minister, with increasingly obvious leanings towards Corn Law Repeal—a policy repugnant alike to the traditions of the Tory party and to the landowning purses which were its principal support. Free Trade was carried, and the Tory party died outright of the shock. Peel had permitted his honesty to plunge him over the precipice of unpopularity, and although he survived

as a name and an influence for four years longer, the day of his power was done. Disraeli and Gladstone, both of them distinguished rankers in the party which Peel had led, were left to do what they could with their vituperative division of his inheritance. For the rest of the reign, the evolution of parties depended upon the whims, rather than the principles, of these two men.

Both of them had been hovering for some time, vulture-like, over the moribund greatness of Peel. Disraeli swooped first, mainly because he was built for tilting at authority. He was himself at least as conspicuous as anybody in the inconsistency which was typical of the period. At the outset of his political career he had deserted the Radicals, not because he disliked their doctrines, but because he saw more chances of personal distinction in the ranks of the Tories. Once in those ranks, he had offended his most distinguished colleagues by his effervescent vulgarity, and by his paraded contempt for their worn-out principles. Neither the sturdy commonsense of Wellington, nor the obscurantism of mere die-hards, was pleased to be taught its creed by a nasty young Jew in a flamboyant waistcoat; and when Disraeli deliberately set out to harass the thorny retreat of Peel upon a position in which half his army was bound to mutiny, even the mutineers were shocked at his devilish disloyalty.

Disraeli, however, was bound to win a fight in which he was not, like his opponent, hampered by any sort of conscience. Moreover, he was wise enough to be prepared with a policy which would suit the die-hards, while Peel could offer no more than the third abandonment in his career of Tory traditions. The Repeal decade was a period of political fantasias; and while the masses were enter-

tained by the vision of Chartism, the classes found interest in the Young England movement which Disraeli forced upon them in his capacity of fashionable novelist. This, in the 'forties, was perhaps the most prominent indication that Toryism was played out; and Young England offered to old Tories, with all the assurance of youth and optimism, a complete set of new principles. They were the output of a brain which as yet was chiefly literary, and they suffered in consequence from the defects of generalisations based on theory rather than experience. Nevertheless, it was the fact that if the 'forties wanted a political programme which was not radical and revolutionary, Disraeli was the only man with anything constructive to offer.

Young England was young only because it moved in youthful company. Its chief supporters were men not yet staid enough to deprecate Disraeli's wanton vagaries, but its principles looked back to that Toryism which Bolingbroke only just failed to introduce and George the Third to consummate—the Toryism of an enlightened Monarchy. But while the Young England movement was a Toryism of Monarchy, with frank and deliberate reliance upon the Throne, it was also a Tory Democracy, relying as frankly and deliberately upon the people; and in that capacity it looked forward to the politics of Disraeli's old age. It is an astonishing thing that the Victorian Age, which must go down to posterity as an age of severely practical achievements (most of them driven by steam), was in its party politics an age of dreams come true. Cobden dreamed of a party to be raised by Peel upon the pillars of Peelite Conservatism and the Radicalism of the Manchester School. Peel himself, and Peel's lieutenants, scorned it for the absurdity it certainly was; yet

Peel's successor brought the ridiculous project to fruition, as time also brought to fruition the contemporary and equally fantastic project of the Chartists.

Disraeli's dream was predestined to a similar fate. The democratic Tory monarchy which he conceived in the literary moods of his political apprenticeship, and which depended for its fulfilment upon the half-realised political promise of Prince Albert; which Disraeli himself abandoned after the Prince's death for something more immediately profitable; was achieved after all by Disraeli, the aged Prime Minister, in partnership with an ageing Queen who was able to take the part meant for her husband with only the dim illumination of her narrower and more bigoted mind. There is everything in common between the Young England of the 'forties and the Victorian England of the 'eighties, except reliance on the land: a Crown flattered by the people and working for the people's benefit: a people loyal to the Crown, more imperial in sympathy than any contemporary monarch except its own, and exercising the democratic franchise in the direction of Conservatism. It was an accident, of course, dependent on Disraeli's careless opportunism, that such a fulfilment of his early visions was possible; but the fulfilment was none the less real for all that.

The immediate future of Young England, however, was not so rosy. It had emphasised its reliance upon the landed interest, and Disraeli was not long in realising that the landed interest had served its turn when it had given him his chance with Peel. Young England was dismissed as a chimera, which it certainly was not, until it came in useful later. Having split the Party in order to save Protection,

Disraeli became a Free Trader, and carried his followers with him. Lord George Bentinck, the only safe anchor-hold for the Protectionists, died conveniently in 1848; Peel followed him in the dawn of the 'fifties; and the stage was left clear for Disraeli and Gladstone. The next decade settled the whole character of later Victorian politics; and the dominant factor throughout was not principle but prejudice—the prejudice of Gladstone the plodder against his more brilliant if less solid contemporary. If Gladstone could have tolerated Disraeli there would have been no Liberal Party. Politics in the 'fifties were at the mercy of personal caprice, and as it was Gladstone's caprice which needed most watching, the rest were gradually compelled to adapt themselves to his decidedly *difficile* inclinations.

The reason for this is clear enough. Parties are not moulded by individual idiosyncracies where there are political principles to take their place. The 'fifties knew no such principles, and therefore the coast was clear for personalities. The year 1852 is the political watershed of the century. Party principles were then a mere hot-pot of confusion, and personal quarrels lay thickly everywhere. The Tory party was still split by Free Trade into Peelites and Conservatives, but the Conservatives had abandoned Protection, the root of division between them and their former colleagues, while the Peelites, no longer led by Peel, were finding loyalty to Aberdeen less easy than they liked. Each half of the Tory party was held together by personal bonds, and not by doctrinal agreement; the Peelites by loyalty to their fallen leader and his successor, the Conservatives by a habit of coherence in support of principles which they had since forsaken at Disraeli's dictate

of expediency. There was no reason on earth why the broken ranks should not be re-formed, by the return of the Peelites to a united Conservative party. The Conservative nucleus was ready enough to welcome the runaways. The Peelites themselves knew that all past disagreements on principles had again disappeared, and Derby was willing to move heaven and earth in order to recover their allegiance. Disraeli did more—he sacrificed to Gladstone the very elaborate dignity which he had recently erected between his rival and himself. In 1853, when Gladstone followed Disraeli at the Exchequer, there had been an unworthy quarrel between them about the value of the furniture to be taken over in Downing Street; and it had ended in Disraeli's writing to Gladstone a dunning letter for about seven hundred pounds, in which he forsook what Gladstone called "the ordinary forms of courtesy" and barricaded himself behind the third person. But in 1855 the Conservatives were so anxious to recapture the Peelites that Disraeli climbed down into the first person again in order to beg the prodigal to be "magnanimous" and return—though he reserved as much of his dignity as he could by omitting from the letter both the address and the signature. The Tories, in fact, made perfect fools of themselves in the desperation of their attempts to win back the Peelites; while the Peelites, with neither principles nor loyalties to bind them any longer, rejected the proffered hand and stood off in isolation.

That is a miniature of Tory politics in the early 'fifties: the main body of Tories anxious for the support of Peelite ability: the Peelites equally anxious for a party to join: and no difference of principle between them. Yet there was no amalgamation—simply because the Peelites held aloof.

The Peelites, moreover, were virtually led in these years by Gladstone—and Gladstone's only deep motive for refusing to rejoin his natural party was his rooted and fostered detestation for Disraeli. In the long-run, the history of Victorian parties comes to this—that in an age when anything might have happened in politics and nobody could prophesy what, it was an absurd and childish personal quarrel which decided the issue. Gladstone and his Peelites might easily have joined anybody—and Gladstone did, in fact, for fifteen years and through five different governments, stick tight to the seats on the government side of the House. There is no need to attribute his conduct to deliberate dishonesty. Gladstone's political opinions in this period were in a viscous condition, ready to flow, however slowly and stickily, in any direction in which they were tilted. A politician with principles of that sort, and a mind capable of whirling about in impossible gyrations, has little difficulty in persuading himself at any given moment that his beliefs are those of the men who have offices to distribute. Gladstone was not a conscious place-hunter—still less a conscious sycophant. He refused office more than once—and on the offer of Whigs as well as of Tories—when he felt that he ought to do it. But he was frank in his declarations that it was office which he desired—when it could be accepted with satisfaction to his honour, and, possibly even more, with the assurance of prolonged tenure. In the whole of his lengthy career, he was never in any of those "in-and-out" ministries which lie spattered over the Victorian period—with the exception of Peel's ill-starred "Bedchamber Ministry" of 1839, which foundered on wholly uncharted rocks. He wanted office, but he weighed

well before accepting it, and once in, he took a deal of moving. He quitted Palmerston in 1855 within a fortnight of joining him, but he had taken good care, in the first place, that Palmerston's ship was seaworthy; and even then he would have stood aside, but for his loyalty to the mistaken counsels of the rest of the Peelites. With these two exceptions his tenure of office was never cut short—because he never accepted it without conviction that it would last.

This consideration, no doubt, lay behind his refusals of office in the minority ministries of Lord Derby. Gladstone was capable of sitting on the ministerial side of the House along with Derby, but he was not fool enough to take office under him until he was sure of a majority. In party politics, as in the deeper policies of statesmanship, Gladstone went with the wind. He was only one of many contemporaries who were doing the same thing—Disraeli and Palmerston among them. But his increasingly self-righteous claims to purity of motive invite critical emphasis upon a protracted line of conduct in which self-interest is patently paramount, with apologies so specious that all but Gladstone himself and his devotees knew them for disingenuous equivocations.

There, then, is one prominent influence on that political course of Gladstone upon which everybody else's course seemed to depend. But it was only a secondary consideration, after all. If Gladstone and the Peelites had joined with Derby, the Tory minority might, before long, have become a majority. After their accession the Tory party would have lacked nothing in brilliance as compared with either the Whigs or the Radicals. With Gladstone, Herbert and Graham added to Disraeli

among his lieutenants, Derby might have done almost anything against those ageing sponsors of Whig fortunes, Palmerston and Russell. But Gladstone's conviction that the Tories could offer him no security was based upon his knowledge of the impossibility that he and Disraeli should pull together in a single team. There is no need to repeat the endless catalogue of characteristics in which they differed. Their professions and their prejudices were poles apart. To psychological incompatibility they had added a quarrel about money—a subject galling to their several susceptibilities, though for very different reasons. They had corresponded without the most ordinary courtesies—and then had ceased to correspond at all, until Disraeli appealed, in the peculiar missive which has been already mentioned, that Gladstone would be "magnanimous."

"Magnanimity" towards Disraeli was, in fact, impossible for Gladstone. If the latter joined Derby, he joined a premier with no vacancy for a first lieutenant. Derby had given to Disraeli the lead in the House of Commons, and he was not disposed to displace him. Disraeli, indeed, offered to relinquish the post—but to Palmerston, and not to Gladstone. When Disraeli wrote his appeal to Gladstone, Palmerston was already over seventy, and both men knew that his death would be the signal for a fight over his post—with all the odds of precedent in favour of Disraeli. Gladstone, like Russell in the same period, was not prepared to take permanent place as third man; and he knew that besides Disraeli's prescriptive claim to the leadership, the brilliance of a more than Jewish resourcefulness might easily outshine his own solid but less versatile parts. Gladstone was determined not to

be beaten. In his youth he had said less than Disraeli about ultimately becoming Prime Minister, but the record of his life leaves it impossible to doubt that that was his deliberate object; and if, in the days of Peel, it was reluctance to compete with the capabilities of his younger contemporaries that had made Disraeli a Tory, instead of a Whig, the tables were now turned, and Gladstone became Liberal instead of Tory for fear of being outrun by Disraeli in the race for position.

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It was this that closed the avenue to Tory reunion. Upon it depended everything that subsequently occurred. But there were meanwhile plenty of other alternatives available. Gladstone did not definitely cast in his lot with the Whigs until 1855, and even then only for two weeks; while as late as 1858 the omniscient *Times* of Delane was foretelling a pan-Tory cabinet with Gladstone at the Exchequer and Disraeli as Foreign Secretary. Delane, however, knew less than we do about their letters to one another; and in fact, Gladstone never went back upon that fortnight of office with the Whigs in 1855; he had taken the plunge, and he was never again a Tory.

Three years before that, however, the Tory combination was being implicitly vetoed in another quarter. Gladstone was not the only person with violent dislikes for former associates. Any possible alliance between Peelites and Tories was dependent upon the soothing superintendence of Palmerston: Disraeli and Gladstone could in any event be got into the same cabinet only by putting them both, in the House of Commons, under the leadership of one whom age, experience and prestige combined to assure him indisputable precedence. Palmerston

was clearly the man. The Toryism of his youth still leavened the Whiggery of his age, and he was Liberal and Conservative enough for any coalition that the 'fifties were likely to produce. Derby could enlist no other Whig; yet the Peelites refused to join him unless Free Trade were guaranteed by some sort of Whig leadership. Palmerston had every qualification except one, and that single deficiency ruined the whole affair. In 1852, he was fresh from his quarrel with the Court over the independence of his foreign policy, and as, at the same time, he annoyed Victoria and Albert by his resolute preference of French to German interests, he was tabooed by them both. Victoria refused to let him lead in the Commons; no other temporary cement was available for the Gladstone-Disraeli breach; a moderate party composed of all the Tories with the Conservative Whigs—a combination otherwise congenial to a Court hunting for a party of its own — was rendered impossible; and thus the animosities of the Crown played an equal part with the animosities of its servants in ruining the only party project of the 'fifties which was backed by any appearance of principle.

Throughout the whole decade Derby persisted in his efforts to attract either Peelites or Palmerston or both. After the middle years, however, failure was inevitable—once Liberal Tories and Conservative Whigs had closed their ranks, for no matter how short a period, in official co-operation. But there was still no fundamental divergence in principle between Whigs, Peelites and Tories, and although the Radicals possessed not only the mature organisation bequeathed by the Anti-Corn-Law League, but also a policy of their own, even they were merely the left wing of a solid phalanx.

Derby himself adequately summarised the position in the middle of the century with a list of parties graduated unbrokenly in descending order of Conservatism :—Tories, Conservatives, Liberal-Conservatives, Whigs, Liberals, Radicals. Any one of these parties might have combined with any other ; and to confirm what would otherwise appear to be mere rhetorical exaggeration, it is the most amazing fact in the party history of the century that in 1853 attempts were made to create a homogeneous party out of a junction between the extreme right and the extreme left—between the Tories under Disraeli and the Radicals under Bright and Cobden; between the most outspoken supporters and the most outspoken opponents of the only policy which in the mid-century marked any clear cleavage of principle. It is quite true that by 1853 the Derby-Disraeli Tories had been officially purged of Protectionism—but that merely serves to emphasise the immoral elasticity of the statesman who, for the next generation, was to lead the party of sound Conservatism. This project of Tory-Radical fusion was, of course, Disraeli's, and it marks a trait which he never completely discarded—the inability to realise that his followers were not necessarily as indifferent as himself to everything but office. The proposed combination split upon two rocks, of which one was the refusal of the diehards to follow into Radicalism a leader whom they had originally approved only for the completeness of his conversion to Toryism. Derby wrote, on behalf of his followers, instructing Disraeli to behave himself—and Disraeli did it, probably because the birds were too high in the bush. In any case, the Radicals ridiculed the whole project. Disraeli had spent his youthful enthusiasms on the landed interest: the

Radicals were the apostles of the newer industrialism. However willing Disraeli may have been to adapt his principles to theirs, if only they would give him power, they certainly were not the men to adapt their principles to his.

In the event, Disraeli was to beat these very Radicals at their own game of democracy; but for the moment the cloven hoof was only too visible, and Disraeli relapsed upon the pillows of orthodox Toryism. Nevertheless, his effort shows at least the value to be set upon the most garrulous Conservative of the age; and it reinforces Salisbury's assertion that nobody except the Radicals had any principles of their own. An alliance between the Radicals, who had spent themselves in the advocacy of Free Trade, and the Peelites, who had ruined themselves in achieving it, was an obvious possibility, in spite of the gulf between temperaments fundamentally innovating and temperaments fundamentally conservative. An alliance between the Radicals, who were men of peace and international goodwill, and the Whigs, who were burdened with a warlike tradition and a still more warlike Palmerston, was less likely, but at least worth considering so long as Russell remained Lord John Reformer. But that Tories who distrusted the reforms of the past should ally with those who proposed still more dangerous reforms for the future; that the party which condemned industrialism should join that of the industrialists; that the advocates of benevolent despotism should link hands with the advocates of unrestricted individual freedom; all this is nothing less than the abjuration of party government by those who most loudly proclaimed it to be an essential of the constitution.

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This gross apostasy from its own professions is the chief charge against the politics of the Victorian period, and blackens its historical record even in comparison with that of the eighteenth century. The Victorians themselves had no conception that such a comparison was possible; and there is, on the face of it, a perfectly obvious absurdity in holding up the eighteenth century as an exemplar of political morals for the nineteenth. Everything that can be said against Georgian political morality has been said over and over again, and it stands eternally and justly condemned in the eyes of posterity. The question is whether the Victorians are not deserving of a similar damnation. It is ridiculous to overlook the manifest contradiction between eighteenth century ethics in theory and in practice—a contradiction at least as great as that between the theory and the practice of the Victorians, of which, indeed, it is merely the converse. The politics of the eighteenth century were riddled with bribery and corruption, with cynicism and indifference, with everything that stamps the age as morally unworthy; and an era in which Walpole and Wilkes, Pelhams and Foxes are the most typical figures, and in which such men as Burke and Chatham are conspicuous only because they are unusual, needs no further condemnation. But after all, it was the elder Pitt who proved himself the greatest of their practical statesmen, and not one of their more typical representatives has attained the immortality of Burke—because Burke's immortality was built upon the rock of firm principle. There was a political philosophy of Whiggism, of which Burke was the chief exponent; there was a political philosophy of Toryism, of which Bolingbroke was the chief exponent: and whatever may

be said against the political practice of the eighteenth century, there is no denying that it was founded upon theories well conceived and definitely formulated. The Whigs were no fortuitous concourse of office-seeking atoms. They were all of them men who believed in Whiggism, and believed in it so firmly that they never dreamed of questioning its fundamentals. The first Whigs were the men who wished to expel the Stuarts, as the first Tories were the men who wished to retain them. The issue was perfectly clear, and if in the course of the eighteenth century modifications were needed, they invalidated neither the principles on which Whiggery and Toryism were based, nor the fact that their origin was the expression of a definite disagreement. If Tory and Whig politics were disgustingly realistic, both Whiggism and Toryism were ideals—the ideals respectively of constitutional and of patriotic kingship. In an age when both Whigs and Tories were politically immoral, their creeds were real branches of political ethics; and if both of them were ideals, they were ideals well within the scope of practical politics.

With Victorian politics it is exactly the reverse. Instead of a parade of apathy, there is a parade of conscience; instead of political Epicureans, we have political Pharisees. Some of the Pharisees were sincere, some of them were humbugs; but whatever they were at heart, they all professed to be upright. Yet, while the shameless politicians of the eighteenth century contrived to make their party politics an expression of party principle, the political prudery of the Victorians relied merely upon shiftless personal expedients, to the exigencies of which principles were repeatedly sacrificed.

This, rather than a superficial divergence in

political conduct, is the essential distinction between the politics of the eighteenth century and those of the nineteenth. The former were based upon principle, and the latter upon expediency. Whereas Whiggery and Toryism were the expression of a reasoned political philosophy, neither Liberalism nor (in consequence) Conservatism came into being as the expression of anything more than the personal predilections and antipathies of individual politicians. In the eighteenth century, parties reflected principles ; in the nineteenth, principles were adapted to personalities, and parties were the result, not of a historical crisis, but of drawing-room manœuvres.

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By the middle of the 'fifties drawing-room manœuvres had failed to combine the Tories with either the Peelites or the Radicals—though the drawing-rooms took a long time to realise that the first combination was no longer possible. It remained for the Peelites to find another resting-place in accordance with their practice of keeping clear of the opposition benches ; and it was this influence which led them into their ill-timed junction with Palmerston on the fall of Aberdeen. Aberdeen had been overthrown for mismanaging the war : he was the Peelite leader, and his policy was the policy of the Peelites at least as much as of anybody else. He had resigned on a direct vote of censure upon that policy. Yet he advised his followers to rejoin the ministry when it was reconstituted under Palmerston—with the result that a country enraged by the bungling senilities of a coalition of Peelites and Whigs watched amazedly the wanton effrontery of its replacement by a coalition of Whigs

and Peelites. There was no important change in *personnel*, except that a doddering old Peelite made way in Downing Street for an energetic old Whig, while the bulk of the Peelites, who were heart and soul with their deposed and discredited leader, seemed to be clinging like limpets to their places. Gladstone himself had qualms which none of his colleagues felt in equal strength. For once he was on the side of the angels, and it is a pity for his reputation that decency was not permitted to prevail. Instead, decency went to the winds ; Gladstone's belief that the Coalition could not be lasting was overcome by the reluctance of the other Peelites to let slip a chance of power : and the scandalous and condemned confederacy resumed its offices.

The country, however, if powerless to prevent this grotesque exhibition of cool party tenacity in the face of a national crisis, was at least determined to speak its mind. The Committee of Enquiry into the war fiasco was forced upon the new government as upon the old, without reference to the feelings of the Peelites. Gladstone and his colleagues were faced with the relentless alternative of resigning, or hanging on in the teeth of a gale of popular opprobrium. They resigned—within a fortnight of accepting office : and in spite of their resignation they remained on the ministerial side of the House, although their sympathies were increasingly against Palmerston, and although they continued to intrigue, behind his back, for readmittance to the ranks of the Opposition. It was these intrigues that lent colour to the rumours which were ubiquitous in these years of an impending Conservative reunion, and that bore fruit in the *Times* prophecy

in 1858 of a Derby cabinet containing Gladstone as well as Disraeli.

Rumour and journalism, however, were alike mistaken. Certainly there remained nothing to choose between the principles of the Peelites and the principles of the Conservatives ; but principles had nothing to do with the matter. Disraeli was still the Conservative second-in-command, and Gladstone was still his enemy, determined not to relapse into Conservatism unless Disraeli yielded him his place. Disraeli, however, was as fond as Gladstone of Downing Street, and though the old rumours gained currency as late as the middle 'sixties, they had been false for years. Gladstone sat with the Tories while they were in office, but he refused to join them because they were not in power ; and when Palmerston returned to the ministerial benches after sixteen months of absence, Gladstone and the Peelites stayed there to welcome him. Palmerston was a steadier horse than either Derby or Disraeli, and it was never a Peelite practice to back outsiders.

Thus the ultimate alignment of Mid-Victorian parties may be regarded as settled at the beginning of Palmerston's second administration in 1859. There was no vote of censure, this time, to exclude the Peelites, and they stayed with Palmerston until he died. They were now definitely on the side of the Whigs, despite their distrust of the Whig Prime Minister, and they never cancelled their allegiance.

Their justification was less elusive than it may have appeared. On the surface it was a coalition, on the old lines, of Peelites and Whigs, and it might have been regarded as furnishing that central party of moderates which the Court desired. In reality, it was no such thing. There was nothing either

central or moderate in the policy of this new party, once it had found its stride, since it was not, in fact, a coalition between Peelites and Whigs, but a coalition between Peelites and Radicals. By 1859, Whiggery was dead, and the remnants of the Whigs were dying. Russell had killed his career by challenging Palmerston in 1851, and had buried it by deserting the Coalition four years later. Palmerston survived, an aged obstructionist, for six more years, during which no progress was possible. But the future lay with the Radicals, and when Palmerston died the way was clear for the development of a programme based on Reform.

Reform was the policy of the Radicals. It was not the policy of the Peelites, who were really apathetic about it. The fundamentals of the Peelite creed were Free Trade, desire for office and loyalty to the shades of Peel and Aberdeen. On the first two of these issues they were at one with every other party ; on the last they were entirely harmless, at any rate after the death of Aberdeen in 1860. If they had rejoined the Tories, they would have fallen in with a Tory programme based upon agricultural development and anything else they could have devised between them. The Tories, however, held out no prospect of safety in power, and the Peelites therefore joined the Radicals ; and because they joined the Radicals, they adopted the Radical programme. That, in a few words, is the origin of the Liberal Party. It arose, not in response to any demand for an organisation devoted to a principle, but in response to the Peelite passion for places ; and because places were not to be had without reform, the Peelites became reformers. The Liberal Party began as a reforming party because the reformers were the most promis-

ing people with whom the Peelites could enter into a sleeping partnership. Its policy from the first was not Liberal but Radical, and except for the convenience of the Peelites the left wing of Victorian politics might have found more congenial allies in the growing political self-consciousness of the Trades Unions, and the left wing of our own day might have been more homogeneous in consequence.

Here, however, was the fulfilment of Cobden's dream of Radical-Peelite fusion. Only, like so many Victorian visions, it was not realised until it had ceased to be warranted by circumstances. Just as concession followed concession in Ireland, from Catholic Emancipation to the measures of Gladstone, but only when each concession had lost its power to avert fresh demands ; just as Chartism found no fulfilment till the Chartists were all dead, and the hungry 'forties forgotten ; just as Tory democracy was achieved only by giving to democracy a meaning which all Tories detested ; and just as the New Imperialism of Disraeli developed into an Imperial Devolution which no Victorian imperialist could fail to regard as a contradiction in terms ; so Cobden's proposal that the Peelites should lead a new party of Free Trade was accomplished, not in 1846, when Peelites and Radicals certainly stood in common opposition to a Protectionist foe, but thirteen years later, when Free Trade was a plank in the platform of every party. The Free Trade party was not formed until events had proved it unnecessary ; there was no need for a party of Free Trade, when no party dare avow Protection. In Peel's lifetime, there would have been at least a semblance of common principle in the Peelite-Radical ranks, whereas the junction

ultimately took place only when Free Trade was less a policy than a postulate.

Thus the fusion of Peelites and Radicals was accomplished by the heat of convenience rather than of policy ; and it was this fortuitous concurrence of conveniences which landed Gladstone into the leadership of the Liberal Party. He was the ablest man in the Liberal ranks, and he was driven more and more by the exigencies of his position into a policy which at heart he disliked. It is natural enough to suppose that because Gladstone was for thirty years the leader of the Liberal party, he was himself a Liberal. Nothing could be more untrue. He had made his name by wise finance as one of the most Conservative members of an essentially Conservative coalition ; he had joined the Radical party through the attraction, not of Radical principles, but of power. He was a lukewarm reformer in an age when even Conservatives dare not neglect reform. Before his definite alliance with the Radicals a reform bill had been proposed by Conservatives whom he would not join; and before he became the first Liberal Prime Minister, the country was already committed by Conservative enactment to a reform far more Liberal than he liked. Gladstone's share in the reforming movement was purely passive ; his policy ambled along behind the times, in the direction in which it was pushed by other hands. Gladstone's own Reform was merely the belated corollary of that of Disraeli, and Gladstone's reformist feelings throughout his career never warmed beyond a benignant apathy. So with his other measures and proposals. His Irish Church Act, his Irish Land Act, and his Irish Home Rule Bill, were all forced upon him by momentary electoral exigencies. All three were sudden expedi-

ents in sudden strategic crises; and Home Rule, the most vital of all, he never managed to achieve. It is beyond conception that such a man should go down to history with the stamp of Liberalism upon him, since he was never more Liberal than party considerations demanded.

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Even his party, however, has reason to question the value of his services. It was to his junction with the Radicals that the Liberal party owed its existence, and that junction was due, like his later improvisations in policy, to passing considerations of party strategics. On becoming Liberal leader, when Whiggery went to the grave with Palmerston, he cast about for twenty years in search of a Liberal slogan to replace the one stolen by Disraeli; and when at last he found it in Home Rule, it was only to split the Liberal party upon it. His Liberalism lay rooted in a dishonourable origin, of which his failure to perceive it made him none the less guilty. It ended in Liberal disruption over a policy which he adopted upon the spur of the moment, and for reasons, not of Liberalism, but of tactics about which he proved mistaken. There was a time when Gladstone promised to pass for the Grand Old Man of Victorianism; instead, he became merely the Grand Old Man of the Liberals —and the Liberals may prolong their homage so long as they think he deserves it. When he first joined the Radicals, philosophers like Mill were not the least vocal among them. After a generation of Gladstone's leadership, the philosophical Radicals had been succeeded by men whose main object was not philosophy but party organisation, and Liberalism was not so much a creed as a business.

The Liberals, however, were not the only people whose idol had feet of clay—and the remarkable thing is that neither Gladstone nor Disraeli was worshipped in fulness until after he had damaged his worshippers' prospects. Gladstone was not the Grand Old Man until he had virtually finished his career by adopting Home Rule : and Disraeli was not even Prime Minister until he had swamped Conservatism in democracy. Both betrayals of party sympathies were merely moves, one ultimately successful and the other a failure, in the insincere struggle for party precedence, and the earlier courses of both Disraeli and Gladstone in their maturity were determined by the scandalous party scramble for identical policies. When it ended by the Conservatives snatching from the Liberals a programme that was certainly not Conservative, Disraeli's action was none the less uncongenial to his followers because they refrained from revolting, as the Radicals did later on the issue of Home Rule. Both parties began this period without a policy ; both raced neck and neck to drink at the fountain of democracy, in which Victorian Conservatism eventually drowned itself ; and the Conservative success in carrying extreme Liberalism against the Liberals left both parties where they began—with no programme at all. Democracy once achieved had no electoral value. Their very success in Liberalism condemned the Conservatives (whose normal safety is to sit still) to the usual penalty of Liberal achievement ; and they had to hunt for fresh proposals, while the Liberals, by the nature of the case, were equally resourceless.

Thus the rush for democracy in the 'sixties was followed in the next decade by a rush for a programme to take its place. The Conservatives found

what they wanted in the New Imperialism—after Gladstone had failed to make it work the electoral oracle ; and the Liberals fell back upon Ireland. In this combination of choices the luck of the Conservatives was greater than they deserved, and it led naturally to the party crisis of the 'eighties, when Conservatism came into its own. The newer imperialism soon found its natural channel in the newer Protection called Imperial Preference ; and imperial preference appealed to those very Radicals who were being simultaneously alienated by Gladstone's proposals for Home Rule. These Radicals—Chamberlain and the rest—were imperialist by disposition, and Home Rule appeared to them to be definitely anti-imperial. The imperialism of imperial preference, on the other hand, was beyond reproach ; and in consequence the Radicals found their sympathies veering naturally towards the policy of the Conservatives.

Thus the 'eighties reproduce in reverse the political paradox of the 'fifties. In both cases there was a junction of left with right, but whereas, in the 'fifties, it was the Conservative moderates who sought the alliance of the Radicals, in the 'eighties it was the extreme Radicals who sought the alliance of the Conservatives. The successors of Tories whom Gladstone had left behind as reactionary, and the Radicals with whom he refused to rush forward into revolution, combined in his old age to form a new party of Unionism. Such, in outline, is the party history of the late Victorian era ; in detail it is less simple, and consequently more convincing.

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While it is perfectly true that Chamberlain and

the Radicals broke with Liberalism on the question of Home Rule, it is absurd to represent Home Rule as the fundamental cause of the split. Chamberlain, in fact, was a Home Ruler himself ; his relations with Parnell had always been friendly ; and he had joined Gladstone's third administration after, and not before, Home Rule had been definitely adopted. Chamberlain had openly recommended Home Rule while Gladstone was still beseeching his followers not to commit themselves ; he was a Radical, with all a Radical's sympathies with self-determination; he had established in Birmingham a reputation for ability in local government as great as his enormous reputation for ability in business ; and he was willing enough to establish a healthy local government in Ireland. The only difference between his Home Rule and that of the Liberal chieftain was that Gladstone's recommendations, once they emerged from the tentative obscurity in which he cautiously screened them from a prying public, were more thorough-going than Chamberlain wished. With Gladstone, party came first, and although his decisions took whole cycles to mature, once made they were always downright enough for the party platform. Gladstone's policies needed reconciling with only one thing at a time—and that one thing was always the Liberal party: a policy which would benefit the party was always good enough for its leader. Chamberlain had less to lose from elections than Gladstone, and his policies were therefore rather more statesmanlike than demagogic ; and in 1885, as in 1903, he thought less of his party than of his political conscience, with the result that on both occasions his party was smashed.

In the case of Tariff Reform, however, Chamberlain forged his own thunderbolt : twenty years

earlier it was forged for him by Gladstone. He had, indeed, been inconveniently restive for several years before Home Rule became a pressing issue, and in 1883 he staggered not only his leader, but the whole political world, by launching an " Unauthorised Programme " of his own. Gladstone was never the man to encourage initiative in his cabinets, and at unauthorised programmes he could only stand aghast. Chamberlain's demands, moreover, were far and away too radical for Gladstone's conservative palate. Half of them were a revival of the unrealised aims of the Chartists: the rest smote Gladstone in two exceedingly vulnerable spots. As a Churchman of unswerving loyalty, he loathed the idea of Disestablishment; while in the budget which had made his early reputation he had ostentatiously rejected that Graduated Income Tax which Chamberlain now proposed. Hence both the political ideals and the political conduct of Chamberlain combined to estrange him from the Liberal leader. There was no less opposition between their temperaments. Gladstone, the normal politician of normal antecedents, standing firmly only because he stood on the rock of political and personal precedent, was in complete contrast to Chamberlain, whose brilliance was original instead of academic, and whose very university was as *parvenu* as his family and his fortunes.

There was enough in all this to precipitate a split at any moment ; and the split would have been wholly Chamberlain's doing. Instead, the Unauthorised Programme was forgotten, and Gladstone was left the privilege of completing, as he had begun, the evolution of Victorian parties, by adopting a policy which half his followers detested. Victorian party history, in fact, is little more after

the death of Peel than a record of Gladstone's political vagaries. To him it had fallen to lead the isolated fortunes of the Peelites; and he had led them, now towards the Conservatives in 1852, then into coalition with Aberdeen—which was natural—and with Palmerston—which was monstrous; then in and out of Palmerston's own cabinet, within a fortnight ; then towards reconciliation, in 1858 and later, with the Derby Conservatives ; then into definite co-operation with Palmerston, who represented all that he hated ; and lastly into a definite alliance with the Radicals, with whom he had no fundamental sympathy whatever. Through all this period it was the conduct of the Peelites which determined the composition of parties ; and the conduct of the Peelites was determined by Gladstone. Now, in his old age, after he had retired from leadership and rushed into it again, there came his final chance of wrecking the party which his earlier inconsistencies had made ; he took it, and the Liberal party was wrecked. Gladstone remained to the end the arbiter of Victorian party destinies.

It was, at least, an exceedingly satisfying Nemesis which lured Gladstone to the destruction of his own party creation. He was the right man to ruin Liberal prospects, if only because his Liberalism was never genuine. That is not, of necessity, to brand Gladstone as a hypocrite. His was that truly Victorian hypocrisy which believes itself to be wholly sincere—the whited Pharisaism which takes pride in its whiteness, and regards all criticism as merely sinful. He combined the brains of a Jesuit with the conscience of a Quaker. Upon his decisions depended the development of British parties ; yet every decision had to pass through the double filter of his nicely refining mind and his nicely refining

conscience—and both mind and conscience served to increase his isolation. Among Conservatives he had been liberal ; among Liberals he was always too conservative ; and neither Liberals nor Conservatives appreciated those mental and moral scrupulosities of his which seemed to rule their own fortunes. The party he left despised him for leaving them ; the party he joined saw no need for cerebral and conscientious convulsions in order to reach their own conclusions ; both gradually wearied of watching the political mountain in such terrific labours, only to bring forth after all such diminutive political mice. It took Gladstone twenty years to become a Liberal, and the process was prodigious, both in itself, and in its consequences for the country ; yet at the end of it all he was never more than a Liberal behind the times, who, in a last desperate struggle to get up-to-date, miscalculated the chances and did Liberalism a great disservice. The whirligig of time brought his revenges, and Gladstone's senile clinging to Liberal leadership merely condemned the Liberal party to share his own exile from office.

The party land-slide of the middle 'eighties was, however, no merely Liberal phenomenon. Liberalism, indeed, suffered in more ways than one, since it lost, not only the brains and business ability of the Chamberlain Radicals, but also the last remnants of Liberal aristocracy. The right wing of the Liberal party was as antagonistic to Gladstone's Home Rule as the left, and both deserted the Liberal ranks together. Chamberlain and his radicals were alienated by the threatened blow to the newer imperialism, which they continued to cherish under the impulse of the disgraced but still influential Dilke. Hartington and the Whig element of the

party were alienated by the threat to their traditions, and thenceforward Liberalism was doomed in the House of Lords. It is a question, indeed, whether Liberalism was not doomed altogether—doomed not so much to extinction as to exposure. Its incongruous constituents had ceased to cohere, and the revelation of their incongruity was in itself a condemnation of the party. Enough has already been said to discount the Liberalism of its leader ; he was a conservative leading Liberals, not always in a Liberal direction—and as often as not, merely following them in that direction. He now hit upon a party policy which both the Liberal wings disliked, and he was foolish enough to make that policy the test of inclusion in the Liberal ranks. He was foolish, because the policy in itself was not inherently Liberal ; Conservatives also were seriously considering Home Rule at the same time, and Parnell was engaged in secret negotiations with Salisbury. But not only were there plenty of prominent Conservatives with Home Rule leanings —there were plenty of prominent Liberals without them ; and those Liberals who favoured Home Rule on its merits were many of them opposed to Gladstone's particular variety of it.

It was in the face of this broken party opinion that Gladstone permitted himself to exact fidelity to his own proposal from every one of his followers. Only those who were prepared to endorse his policy were invited to the party meeting in 1886 ; the rest stayed away from the meeting—and from the party. Nearly a hundred members of undoubted Liberalism voted against Gladstone's bill ; as many more would have voted against it, if party discipline had not overridden their consciences. Even party discipline, however, was not enough to save the

party. Gladstone had backed the wrong horse ; red radicals under Chamberlain deserted him ; sober radicals under Bright deserted him ; the Whig aristocracy under Hartington deserted him. Only a remnant of the Liberal party remained; and of that remnant, the leader was certainly no Liberal.

The natural result was that nobody knew what Liberalism meant. Gladstone insisted that it meant Home Rule—an insistence which invited a double damnation. If he was right, the concession of Home Rule would imply that that particular form of Liberalism was no longer needed ; while in fact, a big minority of Liberals said that he was wrong —that Liberalism was not confined to the pursuit of an Irish policy which Gladstone himself had refused to adopt until the elections forced him to choose between that and standing aside from power. If Gladstone was right, Liberalism was doomed to sterility and extinction once Home Rule was attained ; if Chamberlain and Bright and Hartington were right, Liberalism was only to be found outside the Liberal party. Gladstone's wanton opportunism had courted disaster ; and the disaster had involved not only himself and his immediate fortunes, but the fortunes of the Liberal party for many years to come. Its fate in the new century is no concern of ours; but its horoscope was cast by Gladstone in the 'eighties.

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Secession from one party is bound to involve the interests of its opponents. Political planets need an orbit; and when one solar system loses its attraction, there is a natural gravitation towards another. In the case of the Peelites, gravitation on all sides was so even that it took them a generation to find

their fresh position. In the case of the secessionists of the 'eighties, there was no such difficulty. The Liberal party had shed all its Liberalism but Home Rule; and both Hartington and Chamberlain saw Liberalism enough for their purposes in the Conservative camp. Disraeli had stamped his party with his own Tory democracy ; the most revolutionary reform of the century was a Tory achievement; and Disraeli's younger supporters were ready enough to follow his lead. The new Conservatism was committed to an interest in the people, if only for Disraeli's original reason that the people had most votes. That reason, however, was reinforced among the younger Conservatives by an almost academic hankering after democracy for its own sake. This led, among other things, to the formation by Randolph Churchill of the " Fourth Party," whose principle was devotion to the service of the people by a Conservative people's party. The object of this newer Conservatism can be summarised in Churchill's own words:—

> " The social progress of the people by means of legislative reforms in the lines, and carried under the protection, of the institutions . . . that must be the Conservative cry, as opposed to the foolish scream for *organic* change by the Radicals. . . . Trust the people, and they will follow us in the defence of the Constitution against any and every foe."

The Fourth Party remained a party of four, and it soon died of constitutional debility. But its programme reflected the more enlightened thought of Conservatism—and its enlightenment made a natural appeal to the seceding Liberals.

At the same time the Conservative leader was himself a guarantee that enlightenment would not

be forgotten. Salisbury had always been something of a revolutionary—with the revolutionism of a literary man who was also soundly conservative. He was a rebel by constitution, but always a rebel within the ranks. He quarrelled with his father about his politics and his writings and his marriage, but he continued to live on his father's allowance. He quarrelled with Disraeli about his manners, his policies, and even his Conservatism, but he voted for Disraeli none the less, for fear of voting into his place someone who was not Conservative at all. Salisbury, in fact, hated Disraeli with a hatred at least as cordial as Gladstone's, based upon all Gladstone's motives and more. There were surface resemblances between Salisbury and Disraeli, but they were never more than superficial. Both had emerged from a coddled youth into a young manhood modelled with conscious eccentricity; both fostered temperamental nerves; both made their earliest reputations by political writings—one on each side of the thin line which divides journalism from literature; both began their political careers in an academic age, without academic qualifications; both crowned their unpropitious beginnings with the laurels of premiership. In these things they were like one another and unlike Gladstone. Yet no love was lost between them, since their personal and political temperaments, alike in so much, were fundamentally different. Salisbury was born the son of a marquis: he was himself a marquis for over three quarters of his political life. Disraeli was born—he never knew where, of stock-broking ancestry and a father who was a literary freak. He was an insincere Jew with evangelical leanings; Salisbury was a sincere Christian who could sympathise with Catholicism. Salisbury despised Dis-

raeli for a political charlatan, true to neither his party nor himself, but only to the worst sort of ambition. He detested ambition which was nothing else—he even detested his peerage, and was half inclined to back out of the succession. But journalistic free-lance as he was, rebel from Conservative dogmas and from the Conservative leaders, he was always himself a Conservative and a gentleman—and he regarded Disraeli as neither.

Still, he was not the man to let personalities run him, like Gladstone, into uncharted and uncongenial courses. He harassed Disraeli much as Disraeli had previously harassed Peel, but he never drove his leader out of the party; he had as much complaint as Gladstone against Disraeli and his politics, but he did not follow Gladstone into a party connection with which his sympathies were fewer still. He saw no reason, in the faulty Conservatism of Disraeli, for deserting the true Conservatism of his fathers. Consequently, as Disraeli was well practised in calculating magnanimity, there was no irreparable breach, and in the fulness of time Salisbury became the Conservative premier.

Nevertheless, he carried his sober revolutionism into Downing Street, and it made him a Conservative democrat, like Randolph Churchill himself. He even flirted with Home Rule until he was definitely cut out by Gladstone. At any rate, he was democratic enough in sympathy to attract not only Hartington and his aristocrats but also Chamberlain and his Radicals; and inheriting as he did the new imperialism of his predecessor, he was satisfactory enough to men who had forsaken Gladstone on an imperial issue. There was plenty of principle behind the movement of the secessionists towards Conservatism, since Conservatism was sympathetic

with their sympathies, and antagonistic with their antagonisms. They were not like the Peelites, who for thirteen years stuck solidly to the government benches in order to pick the plums of power; instead, they sat in opposition with Gladstone and their former colleagues, though they always voted against them. There was a decent veiling of the breach until it yawned too wide for concealment; but when, in 1895, they finally accepted office in a Conservative government, they were doing so on principle and not merely in lust of place, and everybody agreed that they were doing the proper thing. The pendulum had swung right back; Disraeli was dead, Gladstone was aged and in retirement; Victorianism had done its day, and parties were once more formed upon principle instead of upon personalities.

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The party politics of the later Victorians, however, were subject to a greater revolution than the mere re-arrangement of the parties themselves. That re-arrangement was by no means completed at the end of the reign. Chamberlain had yet to wreck, by Tariff Reform, the prospects of the party he had helped to mould. Still more important, Labour had yet to find itself a place in Parliament, and to prove that its future was belied by the fiasco of 1895, when every one of its twenty-eight candidates was defeated at the poll.

All this was an evolution in store for the twentieth century. The greater party revolution was, on the contrary, completed by the Victorians—and it was greater because it was a revolution, not merely in the composition of individual parties, but in the essential spirit of party politics. The instrument

of this transformation was the Caucus—a word as vague in its meaning as in its etymology. But at any rate it signifies the control of party policies from below, instead of their imposition from above. No future Gladstone was to split his party by thrusting down its reluctant throat a programme which it could only vomit up again. Party policies were henceforth to be determined by the rank and file, as represented by the local associations. Conservative and Liberal parties alike worked by different means towards a similar end. In 1867 was formed the National Union of Conservative Associations, as ten years later was formed the National Federation of Liberal Associations; and the latter, founded by a business man in a city of big business, speedily became a business concern itself. It was, in fact, Chamberlain's attempt to apply business methods to the politics of party, as he was later to apply them to the politics of Empire. The constitutions of the local Liberal associations were conformed to a standardised pattern, and before long the local programmes were as standardised as the associations. Resolutions in a common formula were passed all over the country by meetings of a common type. Liberalism, in short, was being turned out by mass production.

In all this the moving spirits were Chamberlain and his Birmingham Radicals; and for the first few years of its existence, the National Liberal Federation maintained its headquarters in Birmingham, until Chamberlain was hoist with his own petard. In order to advance principles of which he was the champion, he had erected a party machine that worked with mechanical uniformity. In the early 'eighties the National Liberal Federation was grinding all members of the party into a uniform pattern,

and when Chamberlain himself refused to conform to type the machinery ejected him with a jerk and continued its monotonous functions.

It was a fate that Chamberlain hardly deserved. His motives throughout were well above the average of Victorian purity. He had adopted principles; he was anxious to spread them; and he had created machinery for the work. When he seceded on the question of Home Rule, he appears to have expected his machine to wag its tail and follow him fawning. Instead, it showed no signs of canine fidelity in misfortune, but maintained its mechanical immutability. The National Federation of Liberal Associations, in a word, had been moulded by Chamberlain to the purposes of Gladstonian Liberalism; and if Chamberlain was capable of deserting Gladstone, the Federation was capable of no such thing. Chamberlain became a Unionist, and the Federation continued to stamp all good Liberals with the hall-mark of its Grand Old Man.

Meanwhile there was a similar process of evolution among the Conservatives. Their National Union of Associations had been, in its origin, an attempt to infuse a greater energy into the local bodies. The Conservatives, however, were not slow to realise the electioneering value of the Liberal Federation, and the Union soon became a caucus on similar lines. This development was encouraged by the Chamberlain of the Conservatives—Randolph Churchill, who, like Chamberlain, was born to pursue erratic courses and to cause continual annoyance to his colleagues. The Fourth Party became enthusiastic in support of the caucus. Churchill was himself a Tory Democrat, and in any case there was plenty of democracy in the Conservatism of the later Victorians; and in conse-

quence the control of the party leaders by the party rank and file exercised a powerful attraction.

Here, as elsewhere, the Victorians were their own betrayers. This movement towards party democracy—towards a constitutional form of government within each party organisation, with the caucus as the party parliament, appointing its leader and his cabinet—was not merely a normal outcome of the ingrained constitutionalism of the Victorian mind. It was also a deliberate attempt to give forcible expression to principle. Both the Liberal Federation and the Conservative Union were seeking a more effective propagation of their party beliefs. In order to achieve this, they tightened the party discipline over all their members. Hence the motive behind party manœuvres was always determined by crowd psychology, and crowd psychology is never enlightened. In particular, masses of men are most readily moved by familiar influences, and are rarely responsive to novel ideas. Before long, therefore, the party machines were more mechanical than ever, and the statesmen whom those machines controlled were kept still further behind the times.

It is this which the historian of Victorian parties has called "plebiscitary Cæsarism." Party leaders, like prime ministers, were chosen by machinery based in the long-run upon a sort of universal suffrage. Once chosen, however, they were restricted by nothing more than the possibility of a contingent dismissal. The parties elected their own leaders, and then obeyed them, so long as they avoided offence to the party prejudices. Party was supreme—"sovereign" in something like Rousseau's sense; and like Rousseau's sovereign, it could do no wrong.

Thus once again the Victorians had lost the end in the means, and their belated reaction, in the days

of Churchill and Chamberlain, against the practice which under Gladstone and Disraeli had put party before principle, had itself suffered a similar reaction. Chamberlain's zeal for his principles caused him to stereotype the means of their achievement; hence party principles themselves ceased to be organic, and natural development was replaced by arbitrary decisions.

The interacting cycles of Victorian Party history completed in this way their thoroughly Victorian revolutions. It was not merely that old dreams were fulfilled in a new manner—that Peelites and Radicals had formed a Liberal party as Cobden had suggested, with anything but Cobden's motives; that Whigs and Conservatives had joined their common sympathies in a way which would have gratified Palmerston; or even that Disraeli's fantastic and momentary vision of the 'fifties had taken shape in the Radical fusion with Conservatives in a more or less liberal unionism. The change was more drastic and more Victorian even than that. In 1837 party was a loyalty—a loyalty to traditions at least, if not to clear principles. In 1901 party was merely an organisation, and both the Conservative and the Liberal organisations regarded themselves as more important than their principles. Probably the best characteristic of the Victorians was their methodical conscientiousness. Conscience and method begat system, system begat organisation, and organisation begat the caucus. At the same time the Trade Unions were discovering in organisation a substitute for the statesmanship which the Labour Party necessarily lacked, and this in its turn provoked the other parties to organise themselves still more intensely in opposition. Thus disciplined democracy gave a final impetus to party discipline

in general, since only by being as highly organised as the democracy they had created could the older parties neutralise the restlessness of their offspring. The Victorian politicians had found it necessary not only to educate, but also to fight, their masters.

IX. The Victorian Giants

"Almost every person, if you will believe himself, holds a quite different theory of life from the one on which he is patently acting." (*R. L. Stevenson*, The English Admirals).

IT is perhaps unfortunate for the Victorians, as it is certainly lucky for a retrospective posterity, that their Queen had a Latin name which makes a convenient epithet. It is even possible that a good deal of the fame of English queens has depended on the adaptability of their names to adjectival purposes. There is no difficulty in making an adjective "Elizabethan," and applying it to everything that happened during forty-five years; there is no difficulty in applying the word "Marian" to five years of persecution; and that may be one reason—among many—why Mary and Elizabeth loom large in the history of their reigns, whereas Queen Anne, whose name cannot be twisted into any sort of adjectival shape, is remembered chiefly for being dead. At all events, "Victorian" was too easy an epithet to miss, and it provided all that Arnold had sought in description of his contemporaries, much better than his absurd and justly discarded "Philistine."

At the same time, a word like "Victorian" may mean too much; and it has certainly been used, in our time, to mean almost everything on earth. Chronologically, for instance, Gladstone and Disraeli were both Victorian; but so were Arnold and Rossetti, or Newman and General Booth. Chronology is not everything, and there must be fundamental similarities—as there were, in fact, between Newman and General Booth—before we can feel entitled to talk of Victorian statesmanship at all.

On the surface, of course, the statesmanship of Disraeli and Gladstone—to go no further at present—seems impossible of classification under any sort of label which is more than a mere date. Their obvious incompatibility was not confined to political outlook—to the Liberalism of Gladstone, who, after all, began life as a Tory, and the Conservatism of Disraeli, who began it as a Radical. It extended also to temperament and method. Their personal antipathy is notorious—historical scandalmongers have found it too valuable to neglect, and it culminated in that ridiculous correspondence about the Downing Street furniture, in which Disraeli, who cared equally little for solvency and for personal dignity, strutted absurdly into the third person in order to accuse Gladstone the punctilious (and punctilious above all in money matters) of refusing to pay his debts.

This incident offers a useful commentary on the contrast between the methods employed by the two men in conducting both their business and themselves. Gladstone was a man of meticulous detail; Disraeli a man of broadminded carelessness. Gladstone was so cautious that he rarely went obviously wrong, and intellectually so versatile that he always avoided admitting it when he did. Disraeli was so happy-go-lucky in his attitude to the whole of life, so engrossed in his aims and so heedless of the means of achieving them, that he made a fool of himself time and time again; and with it all he was temperamentally so elastic that he rebounded nimbly from reverses and absurdities alike, and bounced off in a fresh direction as though the angle of impact had no connection whatever with the angle of deflection. Gladstone was a cool, calculating and logical Liberal; Disraeli was an agile, neurotic and

inconsistent Conservative. Gladstone was the political exponent of Free Trade, Home Rule, and Retrenchment; Disraeli the prodigal sponsor of a Unionist Imperialism which pointed the way back to Protection. What can "Victorian" mean, if it describes the statesmanship of them both?

Besides, even chronological obligations must not be shirked. The reign lasted over sixty years, and for thirty of them the most powerful statesman was neither Disraeli nor Gladstone, but Palmerston, who presents problems of his own. The usual formula of "Liberal abroad and Conservative at home," coupled with his innate aristocracy of temper and his predilection for war, makes him merely an orthodox Whig; and the truth of such an estimate is merely emphasised by his relations with the Queen, which amount in substance to a determination to uphold the Revolution Settlement. But if Palmerston was a Whig, so was Russell, and certainly Lord John, the brother of the Duke of Bedford, was no less aristocratic than his rival; and they take almost equal shares of responsibility for pushing the country into the Crimea with a thoroughly Whiggish delight in war. Both Palmerston and Russell were Whigs, in spite of their obvious dissimilarities; yet both of them must be got into the Victorian bottle, along with Disraeli and Gladstone, whom, in the day of their greatness, no Whig or Tory would recognise for either. In short, if political Victorianism seems at first easier to define than its literary counterpart, since literary men are always freaks, whereas politicians are, by hypothesis, merely the sublime of mediocrity—still there is the task of grouping within a single category the statesmen of the 'forties, who took their inspiration from the eighteenth century, and the statesmen who

saw the jubilee and postulated the problems of the twentieth.

Clearly, there is need to transcend party discrepancies which still retain much of their meaning. Walpole and North were men of an age, though one used the Cabinet as a check to the King and the other obeyed the King as a check to the Cabinet. Fox and Johnson are stamped with the mark of their period in spite of their political antipathies, and though they may have been as unlike as Gladstone and Carlyle. Similarly it ought to be possible to realise the spirit of the age which made all the Victorians what they were. The shibboleths which among themselves they could only recognise for incompatibilities of political dialect, may reveal to outsiders that they were all members of the same race. Victorian statesmanship has to mean more than the pursuit of ideals which are either Whig or Tory, Liberal, Conservative or Unionist; it must include them all, and yet distinguish them all at the one end from the Whiggism of the Georges and at the other from the Unionism of to-day.

It is tempting at the outset to brand the statesmanship of the Victorians as a statesmanship of achievement, since on the face of it they got things done. They carried three reforms of their own and made a fourth inevitable. They committed the Empire simultaneously to Home Rule and to Unionism. They never lost a war—which is more than can be said of any other century in modern times, and which was itself largely responsible for their complacent if unfounded conviction of military invincibility.

Still, losing no wars when only one big one is fought, and that with extremely favourable odds, is rather a negative accomplishment; and in fact, the

positive achievement of the century was not military, but either intellectual and democratic, or economic; and in the latter case it was, on the whole, no concern of Victorian politics until the truly Victorian period had passed away. The material advance of Victorian England was touched by politics at only one point—the policy, if policy it should be called, of Free Trade. Even Free Trade, though carried on to legislative achievement by Peel—a real Victorian if an early one—was not at all a Victorian conception: and if it was made to serve the interests of the typical Victorian class, its adoption was much less definitely Victorian than its later repudiation. It was Victorian England which felt the first qualms about the soundness of Free Trade doctrine, and Victorian England which sought to replace it by an Imperial Preference as essentially Victorian in its preferential as in its imperialist aspect. In any case, Free Trade is again an open question; and until expert economists have determined how far to allow the statistics of mid-Victorian prosperity to be used in justification of the statesmanship of Peel, it will be wise to discard it as a proof that that statesmanship was one of achievement.

Apart from industrial and economic evolution, the changes wrought by the Victorians were chiefly religious and constitutional. With the former, statesmanship had little to do, and that little was not always wise. On the whole, according to the most prevalent modern ideals, there was progress. The movement towards toleration and breadth which began ten years ahead of the reign, completed itself before the reign was over by definitely establishing equality of political opportunity for all religious beliefs. Statesmanship, however, played little

part in freeing either Parliament or the Universities from religious tests, since both changes were distinctly overdue, and a politician conservative enough to prevent them would have forfeited his claim to statesmanship of any sort. It was, in fact, characteristic of the religious activities of Victorian statesmen that they were hopelessly behind their own times. It is probably quite true to say that the public aspect of Victorian religion was determined by the Queen herself—in an age which made it a cardinal point of its political philosophy that women were not fit to meddle with theology at all. But Victoria had the sympathies of her two most religious prime ministers. Russell was a Whig of the early nineteenth century, and his ideas of the Church and her functions came piping hot from the Evangelical oven. His Whiggery, moreover, retained something of the initial flavour which appealed to Titus Oates, and which made the Revolution Settlement smack so strongly of Protestantism. Gladstone, on the other hand, never lost in ecclesiastical matters that Toryism of which he had once been the rising hope on the secular side; but it was a Toryism which flourished before the Oxford Movement, and if Gladstone's sympathies marched hand in hand with ritualism, his mental equipment was as protestant as could be wished, and it reinforced the influence which was exercised on his actions by the voting power of the Nonconformists. The Queen completed this trio of militant evangelicals, and the religious statesmanship of the age was in their hands. Victoria reproduced against the Anglo-Catholics that same scruple about the coronation oath which George III had employed against the Catholics of Ireland, and the two Liberals backed her up with all the enthusiasm of men who

were churchmen as well as cabinet ministers. It was their spirit, shared by a good half of the nation, which produced the Catholic Bishopric scare in 1850, and the Public Worship Regulating Act in 1874—on both of which occasions Ritualism in its temporal or its spiritual aspects was subjected to penal legislation which had no effect whatever. The purely religious statesmanship of an age whose intimacy with the Almighty is a byword was, in fact, as barren as its political economics.

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The Victorian period, however, was the age of the constitution, and it is by its constitutional results that it must finally be judged. How far, in this respect, can its statesmanship be called a statesmanship of achievement? In the first place, it is clear enough that a constitutional atmosphere was definitely established among the Victorians—that it was in the constitution that they sought their own salvation. The Chartist movement, for example, was a movement wholly for the attainment of economic ends—for more food and less rent, more money and less work. Yet the remedies which the Chartists proposed for their economic grievances were exclusively constitutional in character—votes for working-men and payment for Members of Parliament, with the other devices of election control which Matthew Arnold, himself a Liberal, was never tired of calling "Liberal nostrums." It was an age in which constitutional improvement was regarded as the infallible panacea, when working men were persuaded to seek in the study of politics, much as they are now persuaded to seek in the study of economics, for an understanding of themselves and of their social position. But it was not merely the

politicians, the O'Connors and Brights, who regarded politics as the supreme study for a people moving towards democracy. The thing is as clearly reflected in Victorian literature, from Tennyson's youthful preoccupations with freedom slowly broadening down from precedent to precedent, through the political novels—best sellers in their day—of Disraeli, and the social novels of Trollope and Mrs. Gaskell or even Dickens, to the craft-consciousness of the historians, who are often more faithful mirrors of their own times than of the times they set out to paint; to Freeman, maintaining without contradiction that history is past politics—a truism among the Victorians, a heresy and an abomination to us only because the Victorians restricted politics to purely constitutional affairs: and with him Stubbs and Maitland, and even Seeley, whose newer historical perspective is, after all, only the extension of constitutionalism into imperial instead of merely national politics. And besides these journeymen of the craft, the masters were pre-occupied with the same sort of production, if on a grander scale: the text-book of the earlier Victorians was Hallam's *Constitutional History,* and the text-book of the later Victorians was Macaulay's glorious failure to provide the historical justification of the Revolution Settlement. Add to these the host of Victorian writings on constitutional practice, and the fact that Bagehot (perhaps the most catholic Victorian of them all, in the division of his interests between finance, economics, politics, physics and literature) is best known as the author of *The English Constitution,* and the constitutional bias of Victorian Literature needs no further illustration.

It is fair, then, to judge the statesmanship of the

Victorians by their achievements in constitutional affairs. And in appearance at least they emerge well from the test. They passed three major reform acts, and several minor ones, which between them practically realised the Chartist programme; and to say that a generation of statesmen carried into law the substance of what their working-men had demanded of them, is to admit that they did justice to their age. When the reign began, statesmanship was anything but democratic. The Tories were still believers in a powerful if beneficent monarchy: the Whigs were still satisfied with the Revolution Settlement, which made England an oligarchy of landed families with a landed political morality. On the Queen's accession, the choice was between Melbourne, who wanted to let everything alone because everything was Whig, and Peel, who thought he betrayed his Tory convictions in consenting to a logical extension of the Toleration Act of 1689. In the middle Victorian period, the choice was between Russell, who was a Whig by choice and by conviction, and Palmerston, who was a Whig by necessity, and by conviction merely an obstructionist. Russell wanted reform to be kept on aristocratic lines: Palmerston wanted reform to be made impossible—and took care that it was indeed impossible during his own lifetime. Later Victorianism took its choice between Gladstone, who detested Radicalism, and Disraeli, who continued to flaunt his Toryism long after Conservatism had replaced it in the political fashions. These men were the material of Victorian statesmanship. Yet Peel put into practice the equalitarian theories of Victorian economics, and Russell forced Disraeli to force Gladstone to complete the edifice of Chartist democracy. Is it anything less than wanton to deny that this is states-

manship conceiving with difficulty, and yet with no less difficulty realising, the spirit of the age?

Let it be granted at once that the spirit of the age was democratic—that the movement was towards the ideal of government by the people, and away from the revolution ideal of an oligarchy which was benevolent when it chose. That was no doubt what the Chartists meant, and Chartism was the early infantile cry of a democracy which till then had been dumb. The Chartist demands were the demands of workers without citizenship for the civic rights with which they could enforce their claims to the physical—and why not also the æsthetic?—necessities of men. "Give us control over the political machinery," they said, "and we will justify your confidence." The claim was too righteous to overlook, and the Victorians did what they asked; they gave them the vote and let them exercise it in secret; and they made it possible for working-men to become Members of Parliament. This was democracy, as the Chartists themselves had seen it; the statesmanship of the Victorians took Chartism at its word, and granted its petitions to the letter.

To the letter; but the spirit was absent, and that is the first charge against Victorian statesmanship. The working classes had asked for bread, and Victorianism gave it, not indeed a stone, but its equivalent in a loaf staled and hardened beyond all use for political nutrition. The demands of the Chartists were made at the beginning of the reign, at a time when their concession would have been of value. The concession was, in fact, deferred until the end of the reign, when political machinery had developed alongside the machinery of industrialism, and when ballot boxes and working-class franchises were about as useful for moving that machinery as

the "Rocket" would be for moving a Scotch express. Soon after the leap in the dark had precipitated the need for Victorianism to educate its masters, the control of political machinery passed from the constituencies to the caucus; and just as Disraeli sought in his newer imperialism an antidote to his own reform act,* so the political parties in general took care that the reform should have as little effect as possible upon party policy. Apart altogether from the question whether in the Victorian period democracy was really desirable, there is no denying the fact that democracy was certainly not achieved. Democratic plant was, indeed, installed, but the machines were after all worked by the party engines, and it was only once in seven years, or a little oftener, that Victorian democracy played more than an ornamental part in the political workshop. Consequently, the working-classes remained discontented; and if they fell back instead upon political machinery of their own, and carried the balancing of classes beyond the comfortable constitutional limits which the Victorians cherished, it is Victorian statesmen who are responsible. They were betrayed in this, as in all their dealings, by that incapacity to tell the end from the means which to their descendants looks so very much like deliberate insincerity. Instead of the economic product which the Chartists had desired, their descendants were given a piece of obsolete machinery: and the modern worker is not to be blamed if he believes that the Victorian politician did it on purpose.

Whether or not that is true—whether or not the gaudy gimcrack democracy of the Victorians was a

* "It [i.e. admitting colonial M.P.'s at Westminster] would allow us to prevent, perhaps, the increase of the town or democratic power, without the odium of directly resisting its demands" (Disraeli to Stanley, in 1872).

deliberate attempt to cheat the class which needs democracy most—at any rate Victorian statesmen deserve this much censure, that they were warned in time by one who knew them well. Matthew Arnold was incapable of sympathy with the Philistinism of politics, but he was not above dropping advice to the politicians as he rode past them on his high horse. It was only two years after Disraeli's Reform Act that Arnold cast into the political arena that polite and ineffectual bomb, *Culture and Anarchy,* in which he lamented with the Victorians that

> "faith in machinery is our besetting danger; often in machinery most absurdly disproportioned to the end which this machinery, if it is to do any good at all, is to serve; but always in machinery, as if it had a value in and for itself."

That was one of the chief troubles with Victorian statesmanship. It sought (let it have for the moment the credit of the intention) to establish democracy; it established instead a democratic machinery so clogged with party grease that the gears refused to engage and democracy got little or no further. The whole business seems so wantonly futile. Disraeli ruins his own and his party's immediate prospects in making the town vote predominant—and forthwith casts about for expedients which will make the town vote inoperative. The Victorian middle class insists on inventing a democratic machine which none of them really wants—and immediately invents another machine called the caucus to nullify the effects of its original invention. That is hardly statesmanship.

Moreover, they do not deserve what we granted them for a moment—the credit of good intentions. There is no need to repeat at this stage the history of the reform bills before they became law, but at

any rate we know that they assumed shapes which all their creators disliked, and which they had certainly not intended. It is always said that Palmerston was kept in power, for the last ten years of his life, simply because he represented more thoroughly than anyone else the opinion of the time: and he was as antagonistic to reform as any man could be. It was not until he was gone that Russell—*ex hypothesi* an inferior representative of the time—could obtain a real hearing for his reform projects—and those projects were anything but models of what actually came to pass. Yet it was because Russell wanted a gentle reform that Disraeli carried a violent one, and it was because the violence of the latter was incomplete that Gladstone felt compelled to carry it to a logical conclusion. Manhood suffrage was established because the political machine had run away with its drivers; and yet manhood suffrage was cheated of realising a democracy which could have been its only possible justification.

There is another aspect to the same question. If we grant, as we must, that Gladstone's contribution to the machinery of the new democracy was forced upon him—that the Reform Acts of 1884 and 1885 were due to the impetus of the Act of 1867, that after the Act of 1867 they were inevitable—then we must also admit that the Liberal share in this liberalising movement was, in fact, almost nothing. It was the Liberals who proposed a moderate reform, the effect of which would have been utterly unlike the effect of Disraeli's leap in the dark; that moderate reform they failed to achieve, and the immoderate reform which was forced upon them realised objects which they did not own. The democracy which the Victorians introduced was not

a Liberal democracy: it was Radical in composition, and it usually voted Conservative, though without much sympathy for the cardinal aims of Conservatism. An analysis of the election results since 1867 will go far to show that in consenting to Disraeli's Reform the Liberals sanctioned the use of a weapon which might annihilate their own prospects. From this point of view, the Tory democracy of Disraeli became a reality—at all events, the enfranchised workman has proved himself more conservative than the Mid-Victorian middle classes.

But while Liberalism deserves no credit whatever for Victorian democracy, the Conservatives can claim very little more. They consented to any reform at all merely in order to avert an immediate party defeat; they suffered the defeat notwithstanding, and sought at once to neutralise their own reform; and it was not until Conservatism had found aims not Victorian that the Conservative party discovered how to beat the Liberals at demagogy. Demagogy, however, is rarely democracy. The democracy of the Victorians was in itself an accident; in practice it was largely an illusion; and politicians are not statesmen because they create accidental illusions.

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It is hard, therefore, to resist the conclusion, which without examination would have seemed a paradox, that the statesmanship of the Victorians was in reality barren. It was undoubtedly a creative age—in science, in literature, in art, in theology; but in politics, so far as realities and not merely superficial appearances are concerned, there was no genuine creativeness at all. This is what Arnold

(who was by no means blind to the creativeness of his contemporaries) meant when he complained of "a time of instrumental statesmen like the present"—the "present" being, as before, immediately after the most famous and most typical legislative enactment of the age. It is what Disraeli meant when he called it "an age of great events and little men." Yet the opportunity for greatness was by no means lacking: problems were there to solve, and great statesmanship would hardly have needed sixty-four years in which to solve them.

It is often remarked that the political conditions of modern times are less helpful to the consistent pursuit of an individually conceived policy than the political conditions of a century or two ago—that the swing of the political pendulum precludes that continuous tenure of power which is necessary for the realisation of any homogeneous programme. There may be much in this contention: but political pendulums had a habit of swinging even before the discovery of Septennial Acts, and in the less politely regulated politics of former ages they were as likely as not to smash into a political career on the rebound. In other words, if modern statesmen have fewer chances of holding the reins of office over long periods, the corollary is equally true that while office is theirs they are troubled by lesser risks than those of their predecessors. If Palmerston could not, like Richelieu, get twenty uninterrupted years for the unfolding of his policies, he was, at all events, free from major distractions while he held his power.

But it is by no means clear that Palmerston was, in fact, any worse off for time than Richelieu—and it is certain that he was far more fortunate in this respect than a good many other statesmen who have

left an abiding mark upon the ages. Of the last thirty-five years of his life, he was in office, either as Foreign Secretary or as Prime Minister, for about twenty-five—seven years longer, in the aggregate, than Richelieu; five times as long as the period in which Cromwell or Chatham completed the bulk of their work. If a man cannot in twenty-five years' control of foreign affairs evolve and maintain a definite and consistent policy, that man is not a statesman of high rank. There is no possibility of attributing greatness to the foreign policy of Palmerston. Efficiency, perhaps, it may venture to claim—but even that claim is bound to be disputed. Merely administrative efficiency was never a mark of Palmerston's proceedings: he kept such careless records that at least one successor of his at the Foreign Office found business impossible to transact after him; and this was of a piece with his whole attitude to his official responsibilities—an attitude which permitted him at one time to confuse his personal and his official relationships so thoroughly that the Duke of Wellington's Tory policy had to depend for information upon the private correspondence of his Whig rival, while at another he made the distinction between those two sets of relations the excuse for his failure to co-ordinate his activities with the other activities of his own government. The events which led to his dismissal in 1851 have been staled by repetition, but they make, none the less, a formidable indictment of Palmerston's statesmanship. It is one of the first necessities of every statesman to relate himself with his time, and one who prefers to plough a lonely furrow across the political pasture is hardly fit to monopolise a policy, let alone a government.

It will be said that Palmerston's conduct of

foreign affairs at least succeeded in maintaining a lengthy peace. It is certainly true that during Palmerston's last twenty-five years of office only two were years of European war—though it is also true that those two years of war were largely of his own making. When Palmerston is being praised for the success of his militant pacifism, it ought to be remembered that if he had died when he was sixty-five, England would probably have kept out of the Crimea—and there would have been one war less in the history of the Eastern Question. There is nowadays a big balance of conviction that the Crimean War was a mistake and that in entering it we were the catspaw of Napoleon III. If that be so, it is worth while recalling that Palmerston, who was keener on hostilities than any other English statesman, with the more than doubtful exception of Russell, was also the man who, two years before, had been dismissed for his unauthorised and impolitic support of Napoleon's *coup d'état*. Similarly, if in Palmerston's favour there is adduced the undoubted fact that his earlier diplomacy had heightened the prestige of England in international affairs, it is just to set against it not only his responsibility in influencing the country towards this particular blunder, but also his work in saddling England with the fantastic fooleries of his own bombast. He may himself have enjoyed the *civis Romanus* peroration in which he upheld the British inviolability of a Jew with a Spanish name, but that sort of thing merely made us ridiculous in the eyes of Europe. It happened in the middle of the nineteenth century that England's financial position was strong enough to stand a good deal of absurdity on the part of her statesmen. If bombastic threats were uttered, we could afford, if need be, to make them good; and

we were considerably helped by the fact that at that time our two most formidable rivals in Europe were fully preoccupied by their own affairs—Germany pregnant with nationality, and France only too eager for anybody's assistance in inducing an abortion before it should be too late. But in the long period, after all, such encouragement by Palmerston of the Victorian conviction that England was superior to everything and everybody, was short-sighted and mischievous—especially since every single war we undertook in the reign was ridiculously mismanaged. It was lucky for Palmerston that Europe was too distracted to require the fulfilment of his threats.

Palmerston's reputation, in fact, is based very largely upon his almost infallible luck. It would, of course, be absurd to minimise his brilliance; but at the same time it would be equally absurd to ignore his frequent escapes from ignominious failure. It was the failure, moreover, which marked his later years; the brilliance was pre-Victorian, and if Palmerston is to take rank among famous foreign ministers, it must be as a Georgian and not as a Victorian statesman. He belongs, in fact, to the easy-going age of Melbourne, when statesmanship was happy-go-lucky and irresponsible. Victorianism was largely a reaction from the nonchalance of an earlier generation; and Melbourne's earnest desire to "let it alone" was the protest of an age of indifference against the first meddlings of an age of busybodies. It was Bagehot (and if too frequent appeal seems to be made to Bagehot's judgment it is because he is one of the most trustworthy of Victorian barometers) who complained that in his day everybody wanted to do too much; that action seemed to be valued for its own sake, as

Arnold had complained that machinery seemed to be valued for its own sake, irrespective of the result in either case; that, in the words of Bagehot's biographer,

> " half the public actions, and a great many of the private actions, of men, had better never have been done; that modern statesmen and modern peoples are far too willing to burden themselves with responsibilities."

In short, the Victorian reaction against the *laissez-aller* of Melbourne and his contemporaries took the shape of a determination to let nothing alone, to interfere with as much as possible. In the course of their age the Victorians evolved the business methods which were essential to this policy of universal interference, and thoroughness in detail became one of their chief characteristics. Palmerston, however, was by no means thorough in detail. He was neither careful enough nor conscientious enough for high Victorianism. In the Georgian age of indifference he had reaped the advantages of his active temperament: for Palmerston was Victorian enough to be a busybody. The age of Palmerston, in fact—the age which by universal consent collapsed suddenly on October 18th, 1865—was an age of transition from the Georgian (if that is the right epithet for the morning of the nineteenth century) to Victorianism as we understand it: and, to a certain extent, Palmerston gained the usual advantages of running with the hare and hunting with the hounds. When everybody else was too lazy to be active, Palmerston scored by his consistent activity : and among careless contemporaries his own carelessness went unnoticed, except by military precisians like the Duke of Wellington.

Thus Palmerston the busybody was able to make

a reputation among the Indifferents; and because reputations once made are not easily lost, he maintained it among the Busybodies, although he was as careless in administration as any Indifferent. One of his most favourable biographers has summarised his claim to greatness by saying that

> "he had created Belgium, saved Portugal and Spain from absolutism, rescued Turkey from Russia and the highway to India from France."

England, it may be noted in passing, is not mentioned; but in any case every one of those achievements was complete before Melbourne ceased to be Prime Minister—in an age which was anything but Victorian. It was the reputation acquired in Georgian times which endeared Palmerston to the Victorians of his dotage.*

There is no doubt about the Victorians' having regarded him as one of themselves. They made him Premier at seventy and kept him Premier till he died at eighty, because he suited them—because, in fact, he tickled their vanity. He was a busybody, and his indifference was forgotten and forgiven. Nevertheless, his policy during Victorian times will not bear too close scrutiny. He failed even to continue with consistency the policy which had made his name. If he saved Spain from absolutism in 1834, and the highway to India from France in 1841,

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* It has, perhaps, nothing to do with Victorian politics, but it is at any rate interesting in an estimate of Palmerston's statesmanship to notice that even his earlier reputation is suffering in the limelight of recent research. If anything made Palmerston's reputation, it was his conduct of the negotiations which led to Belgian independence. Even here, however, his policy was in no sense his own; he was merely administering, in his own active and showy manner, a policy originated by Aberdeen, who had preceded him as Foreign Secretary and fallen with the Tories in 1830. "The handling of the Belgian affair was thenceforth in Palmerston's hands; but it must not be forgotten that the lines of the settlement were laid down by Lord Aberdeen" (Mowat: *European Diplomacy in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 71).

it was only in 1846 that he forced Spain to fall under French influence, by his conduct in the affair of the Spanish marriages; and the value of his London Treaty of 1841 has already been considered in the light of later events. Even so early, in fact, his policy is tainted with the indifference which made him content with ten years as the lifetime of the Treaty of Paris. He lacked the first requisite of genuine statesmanship—the ability to hold consistently to a long-period policy carefully devised beforehand. He was a busybody with political principles which were at once opportunist and conservative, and the combination led him nowhere. Isolated examples of gratuitous and insulting interference with nations not in a position to retaliate may have pleased the temperament of the Victorians, and Palmerston had his reward in the esteem of his contemporaries. Posterity, however, will know him by his deeds; and his deeds were not in any known line of political development.

They were not even in a straight line with one another. So far as principles can be deduced from Palmerston's conduct of affairs, those principles are his sympathy with foreign Liberalism and with France, and his antipathy to Germany. That the antipathy to Germany was based chiefly on ignorance we know from his relations with the English Court, which was itself more than half German; and we have already seen how he was with difficulty restrained from plunging England, by that ignorance, into an ill-considered war with the most powerful military nation of modern times. On that occasion his measure had been taken by the Germans at Windsor and Berlin, and he was simply ignored, by Bismarck at any rate, as a garrulous but harmless old man. But it is the partial bio-

grapher already quoted who remarks that "if the Danish succession question may be taken as a test, Palmerston's want of information on the inner workings of Teutonic politics was very considerable." If it was foolish to base his German antipathies upon ignorance, it might have been disastrous to carry those antipathies into a diplomacy which was not merely truculent but careless as well.

Palmerston seems to have borne with an equally light heart—though certainly not with an equally ignorant head—his affections for Spain and for France. It has been already noticed that his salvation of Spain from despotism was followed by a diplomacy which would have deserted the traditions of English policy by throwing Spain into the arms of France, if Palmerston's own anticipations had been verified. It was a piece of Palmerston's own carelessness in detail which precipitated the crisis of the Spanish marriages; and it was not Palmerston who averted the natural consequences of France's deliberate flouting of England over the whole affair. It was Palmerston's unheeding meddlesomeness which offended the Spanish Queen in 1848 and led to the expulsion of the English ambassador from Madrid. It was Palmerston's thoughtlessness in permitting arms to be sent from Woolwich to Naples in the same year which involved English dignity in an open apology to one of the least important and most infamous monarchs of Europe. It was Palmerston's precipitate and unauthorised approval of the *coup d'état* of 1851 which again revealed not only the inconsistencies but also the secrets of British policy. In face of a list like this it becomes more than doubtful whether Palmerston can, after all, claim to have heightened the Continental prestige of this country. And once posterity decides

to disallow that, Palmerston's reputation for statesmanship will go whistling down the wind.

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It is impossible to leave the Palmerston epoch without considering the position of Lord John Russell. Russell himself would have preferred to say that it is impossible to leave the Russell epoch without considering the position of Palmerston ; only the verdict of history has so far followed the verdict of contemporaries in the opposite direction. Or at least, if it was not their own contemporaries who so decided, it was the generation which saw them die. A coffin can make an enormous difference to a man's character, and the generation which buried Palmerston said nothing but good of the dead, whereas Russell lived on to an unfortunate dotage during which he was alive, and therefore subject to disparagement, especially as he was inevitably superseded by younger and healthier men. A statesman who lives to arouse the pity of his contemporaries stands little chance of the admiration of posterity ; and that was the fate of Russell. When he died in 1878, the Victorians were already forgetting that he was recently a power among them—so high, in fact, that he was Palmerston's premier before he was Palmerston's subordinate. A man big enough to dismiss Palmerston from the Foreign Office is no negligible factor in the politics of his age—and one has to remember, as well, that the chief *raison d'être* of the Aberdeen Coalition was the need to include Russell and Palmerston in the same cabinet: while there would never have been a Crimean War, as far as England was concerned, if only Aberdeen could have been persuaded earlier that Russell was not indispensable.

There was at the time, in fact, a pretty general impression that the inability of the Whigs to do more than they did with their years of office was due primarily to the clash of talent between the two leaders; though neither Russell nor Palmerston would have been over-pleased to anticipate that the rehabilitation of his fame was going to depend, in this way, on establishing the concurrent greatness of the other. One of the most sensible of the Whigs summed up the position in 1859 by saying that a forward policy was impossible

> "as long as we have two noble lords who do not act in unison, but who are constantly striving who is to smell first at the nosegay."

At any rate, during the first thirty years of the reign the Whigs were twenty-one years in power without developing a Whig policy. On the surface it was Russell who was most to blame. There is no blinking his inordinate conceit, and there were times when he put quite bluntly his determination either to withhold from the country his services—which he allowed to be invaluable—or to be taken at his own estimation as Palmerston's superior; all of which made for bad blood and party inefficiency. Bad blood, indeed, seems to have blighted the Victorian period throughout; but whereas the mutual detestation of Disraeli and Gladstone stimulated party competition and made for progress—a progress, in fact, more rapid than either side desired—the purely Whig rivalry of Russell and Palmerston simply resulted in party sluggishness. Palmerston was left to go his own way around his own vicious diplomatic circles, while Russell found his domestic policy thwarted at every turn by the other's obstructionism.

It is this which makes Russell, for a man of

clear aims and a straight conscience, so singularly elusive in retrospect as a political factor. The elusiveness seems, indeed, to have cheated contemporaries as well as ourselves, if we may judge from his repeated attempts to explain his own importance to his own generation. Empty vessels make most sound, and perhaps the Victorians argued backwards with the proverb in appraising Russell's position. When a man goes out of his way to insist on his own weight in affairs, and when he is nevertheless turned out of the leadership by a man of greater personal modesty, it is natural enough for the worldly-wise to find comfort in disparaging him, and to feel pleased when pride has its fall. At all events, the Victorians soon forgot Russell, and thereby made it all the more difficult for ourselves to recapture his significance. By his deeds ye shall know him—and in fact he did nothing whatever. He honestly abandoned his post as Finality Jack, and apart from such minor absurdities as the Catholic scare of 1850, he was stamped for the rest of his career as the champion of Reform—"Lord John Reformer." Yet the only Victorian reform act passed in his lifetime was the work of his political opponents.

Nevertheless, he was a man with a policy: and although the cup of reform was taken from his hands and drunk to the dirty dregs by Disraeli, it was Russell who had drawn the vintage—and without any idea of drinking off anything offensive. After all, Disraeli passed a mad reform bill only because Russell proposed a sane one. Russell provided the motive force : and the force of Lord John Reformer was strong enough to carry Reform, even though his opponents were strong enough to ruin it. If only Disraeli, whose passion for cheap

histrionics was active enough to be fulsome, could have had the dramatic sense and the dramatic decency to stand down (his party would have been beaten none the sooner) and let Russell carry a second Reform Act after thirty-five years, Victorian politics in the broader sense might have been a sublime comedy instead of a sordid tragedy. But Disraeli had succeeded Palmerston as Russell's evil genius, and the little man with the big idea, if bigger conceit, soon faded into the obscurity of the second-rate. If Palmerston and Disraeli had been as conscientious as himself and less selfish, it is at least possible that Russell would have been reckoned the greatest of Victorian statesmen.

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Palmerston and Disraeli, however, were as keen as Russell in looking after themselves, and their sense of humour saved them from his ignominies; and while Disraeli was running off with Russell's reforming clothes, the later Victorian age was upon them, and Russell, relegated at first to the Lords, and later to the unhappy seclusion of old age, was already out of date. The golden age of Victorian politics had dawned—the age of Gladstone and Disraeli.

It is in this period that the essential characteristics of Victorian politics are concentrated: it is this which is most generally received as the Victorian Age. All the Victorian reform acts are crowded into its not very extended limits, and most of the rest of the biggest Victorian legislation. In the twenty years beginning with Disraeli's first ministry, not only were there the two or three parliamentary reforms, but in addition the Irish Church was disestablished, four Irish Land Acts were

passed, including the critical one of 1870, a final solution, as far as the Victorians were concerned, was found for the education problem in Ireland, and Home Rule became a living issue ; English education was made free and compulsory ; peace was brought back from Berlin with honour; and the Queen was made also an Empress, as a token of the new imperialism which had come amongst us. Certainly, this was the age of busybodies—the age of achievement. What of the statesmanship that achieved?

A statesman is one who sets his own mark upon a political era ; and with that, we damn both Gladstone and Disraeli. It was not they who set their mark upon the Victorian era, but the era which set its mark upon them. It is the plainest characteristic of the statesmanship of both of them that they floated with the tide. That may, indeed, be inevitable under the conditions of any democracy; but in this instance the democracy was their own creation, and in any case their failure to guide their people instead of following them remains unaffected. Enough has perhaps been said already about their constitutional reforms; they soon gained an impetus which carried them far beyond the desires of those who had given the first push, and it was in their own despite that the Victorians became involved in unchecked democracy. The reason was simply this, that both by Disraeli and by Gladstone party was put before principle—or, at the best, that party principle was put before statesmanship.

It is the old story of preferring the means to the end—of valuing the machinery above the product. Instead of each party regarding itself as an instrument towards some particular good, party fortunes were regarded as ultimate realities; instead of

justifying place by policy, both parties tumbled over one another in the race for such policies as would keep them their places. Whether it is Disraeli committing the country, for good or evil, to the control of an insufficiently educated proletariat, or Gladstone committing the country, for good or evil, to an ever-widening policy of Home Rule, the motives are always motives of party, they are never motives of state. It was the age of party, and party considerations dominated politics to such an extent that the very meaning of the word " politics " found itself limited, at the end of the period, to party manœuvres.

That is the chief reason why the biggest of the Victorian politicians fade in the perspective of History into relative littleness. They are so firmly bound by the exigencies of their age—almost by the exigencies of the moment; they are incapable of defying their age in its own interests, or of asserting themselves against its passing peculiarities in order to achieve a statesmanship of lasting merit. Statesmanlike self-assertion in the face of contemporary prejudice was too risky a game for the Victorians; they preferred to play safe and stick to office; and office was so dear to them that they even conferred official status upon Her Majesty's Opposition, determined to stick to that if nothing better was forthcoming. There is never visible, in the politics of the Victorians, the irresistible impulse of a driving-force; there is always some temporary axe to grind. It is this which accounts for one of the major paradoxes of the period—it is an age of gigantic political changes, which are nevertheless the work of political pigmies.

Victorian Liberals called Gladstone a giant, as Victorian Conservatives called Disraeli a giant ;

and we are never too anxious to revise traditional judgments. But Victorian statesmanship suffers under the searchlight. Disraeli gave political birth to English democracy; Gladstone did the same for the Home Rule Movement; but they were both of them ignorant of their political pregnancy till they were in labour, and their offspring were both born of unhallowed unions. Disraeli's democracy was due to a passing liaison with discontented Liberals, and Gladstone's Irish policy to his seduction, as sudden as it was reluctant, by Parnell. There were good arguments in favour of a democratic franchise, as there were good arguments in favour of Home Rule; there were equally good arguments against both; and Disraeli and Gladstone knew both sides equally well, and were long enough unable to decide between them. The consequence was that in both cases the ultimate step was taken under the influence of considerations which ought to have been too petty to count; and so England became a democracy in order to dish the Whigs, as Ireland was offered self-government because Gladstone wanted to dish the Conservatives.

In a word, the statesmanship of the age was unprincipled. That is, of course, quite enough to provoke the twin choruses of orthodox Liberalism and orthodox Conservatism to their antiphonal protests. Good Liberals believe that Gladstone was the supreme example of high principle in politics; and if bad Conservatives gloat in private over Disraeli's evasiveness, at any rate they agree with the good ones in holding that somehow good was the final goal of ill, and that the grease which lubricated Disraeli's personal career served simultaneously as an efficacious nutrient to the body politic of an honest Conservatism. The Liberals

stand no nonsense: Gladstone was a good man, and there is an end of it. The Conservatives, on the other hand, know that they would be fools to claim Disraeli for a saint; but they do at least claim that his political principles were honestly conceived and honestly followed.

The truth is, however, that neither Disraeli nor Gladstone either conceived or followed broad principles at all. Conservatives may quote by the yard from *Coningsby* and *Sybil,* and then insist that the prophecies of his forties were fulfilled when Disraeli became prime minister at seventy; the fact remains that they have a hiatus to explain away. Disraeli's political novels and tracts may have had prescience, though it is more likely that they were meant merely for contemporary shockers, and that Disraeli was as surprised as anybody (and more surprised than most) when his early prognostications came true. But give all possible weight to the fact that the Tory democracy of Disraeli's nonage was a good deal like the Tory democracy of which he dreamed in his literary youth, and you have still to explain why Disraeli was following after other gods in the meantime. He may have been talking about Tory democracy in 1840: he may have been making it real in 1880: but half-way between those dates he was urging the country not to rush into the arms of an uneducated proletariat. And if you show that at the same time he was saying just the opposite, you may have scored a debating point, but you have not proved Disraeli to be a statesman.

So with Gladstone; only here it is the old story of Macaulay's Charles the First over again. If we charge Gladstone with being an unprincipled politician, one Liberal replies that he loved his wife, and

another that he was as honest with the nation's money as with his own, and a third that his scholarship was painstaking and conscientious. Those are not the points at issue. Let us, in justice or Christian charity or anything else, so long as we keep our tempers, discard the suggestions of epithets like "honest" and "hypocritical." A man may deceive himself and still be a saint; there are plenty of whited sepulchres who never realise that they lack one thing yet; and even if it is ever shown that Gladstone was worse than his age in this respect, it need not affect his reputation as a statesman. Walpole was considerably less of a hypocrite than Chatham, but nobody dares to claim him as the better man. What we have to decide about Gladstone is not whether he was as good as he thought, but whether his statesmanship was as good as his admirers pretend.

There is only one way to meet the charge that his statesmanship is unprincipled—and that is to point out its principles and show that they were consistently followed. And here, as ever, details are less important than the broad view. Stand back from the canvas, and mark the salient features of Gladstone's political portrait. Financial brilliance; Parliamentary reform; above all, justice for Ireland—these are the roots of Gladstone's political reputation, and they are all that a sympathetic Liberal will feel that he needs to claim as establishing Gladstone's greatness. How far is the sympathetic Liberal justified by the facts?

Finance is inevitably dull, and the less said about it the better. In any case, Gladstone was in this less lucky than his deserts, since his most brilliant financial period was followed by the biggest Victorian war, which upset his estimates and ran away with

his savings. Still, from the point of view of historical criticism, this may be a positive advantage, since it compels us to appraise his budgets, not upon a statistical account of the fruits of a penny-wise cheeseparing—and there is no doubt that Gladstone was good at that—but upon the principles on which they were framed. That drives us back to the first budget, in 1853, which all Liberals and many Conservatives claim, in so many words, as one of the financial landmarks of the century. How far was that budget original, and how far was its originality good ?

Gladstone's reputation with posterity has gained beyond reckoning by the fact that the author of his standard biography was a man predetermined by personal and party ties to prove that both Gladstone and Liberalism were as near perfection as they could be. Gladstone's case, therefore, can hardly suffer if we accept in his defence the lamentably prejudiced estimate of Lord Morley, who consistently says everything that can be said in Gladstone's favour, and often suppresses vital counts against him. Morley is explicit enough about the merits of the 1853 budget : they are that Gladstone based his estimates upon the finances of the country over a period of longer than one year; that he continued to adapt them to the circumstances of the new Free Trade position ; that he frankly faced the necessity for a reimposition of the Income Tax, and gave it, in his budget speech, a reasoned justification; and that he more nearly equalised the incidence of taxation by extending legacy duties to real as well as personal property.

Those four items comprise the essence of Morley's claim for Gladstone's financial brilliance. Of the first, it may be said at once that it was both sound

economy and sound Economics, in its acceptance of the seven-years trade-cycle of the theorists as the basis of national reckonings. So much at least stands to Gladstone's credit, that in this matter of financial method he was as ready as anyone to listen to the economists, in an age when the economists attracted far more than their share of attention. Moreover, the choice of the actual period was apparently his own. Disraeli had suggested, in his budget of the previous December, the principle of budgeting for more than one year at a time; Gladstone adopted the suggestion, and put it on a sound academic basis. It was not his fault that the first time in the century that a Chancellor looked so far ahead the Crimean War stepped in and falsified all his estimates. The principle was a good one, and it has worked well in happier times.

Nevertheless, merely taking a leaf from an Economics textbook and sticking it into the budget, admirable though it undoubtedly was as an improvement in the national method of accounting, is hardly enough to create a financial reputation; and unfortunately for Gladstone, the other three merits claimed for him by his biographer do very little to help it out. If Disraeli had dropped a hint about long-period budgeting which Gladstone had converted into a principle, he had quite as certainly accepted the Free Trade position in 1852, and attempted to readjust taxation to the implications of that position ; and the two things taken together go a long way to justify the claim which Disraeli made at the time in an anonymous article, and which Tories have gone on repeating ever since, that Gladstone's budget of 1853 "as a whole is a caricature and exaggeration of Mr. Disraeli's financial projects and speeches." It is possible that there

is a great amount of truth in that claim ; but if there is only a little—and it is hard to deny so much—it makes short work with the traditional glories of Gladstonian finance. As to the Income Tax, it was not an original measure; it was accepted by Gladstone as a purely temporary expedient; and it nevertheless proved in the event to be permanently necessary—possibly, as the Liberals insisted, owing to the Crimean War; but certainly in accordance with Disraeli's prophecy before ever the war was thought of. Gladstone fared no more happily in the immediate future over his legacy duties: they were intended to make the landed classes contribute their share to the exchequer; and they were estimated to produce £2,000,000. Instead, they produced a quarter of that sum, so that the incidence of taxation was not materially altered, while the exchequer gained next to nothing.

The truth is that in this, as in so much else, the indiscriminate repetition by historians of the impressions of contemporaries has established a tradition which has very little basis in fact. Gladstone's budget of 1853 was not a financial landmark of the century; it was a political landmark. It made its enormous impression, not (as many of Gladstone's colleagues asserted at the time, and as many historians have followed them in asserting since) because it embodied new principles, but because it provided a new man. Its outstanding merits were the combination of meticulous care with prudent foresight—a creditable combination enough, but by no means original. It followed conscientiously in the paths which predecessors had pointed out, and it was a good workmanlike job. But it was as a workmanlike job, which it undoubtedly was, and not as a financial revolution, which

it undoubtedly was not, that it made Gladstone's reputation; and it made that reputation because the rather humdrum abilities which marked his budget preparations and the by no means humdrum abilities which marked his budget speeches, showed not only where the next national meal was to come from, but where the next prime minister was to come from. Aberdeen was old, and nobody knew who his successor would be, until Gladstone's five-hour speech on the budget. After that speech, the problem was solved: and if contemporaries deceived themselves that their relief was in finding a Chancellor of the Exchequer, History at any rate knows that it was in finding a Prime Minister. Disraeli's future had been assured in 1852. Gladstone's future was assured on April 18th, 1853: that five-hours speech was the definite beginning of an age; and if the age was not to reach maturity till veterans had passed away, nevertheless it was Gladstone's first budget that marked him out as the Liberal leader in that middle Victorian era in which Disraeli was already destined to lead the Conservatives.

That is really the reason why congratulations were so loud when Gladstone introduced his budget. There is another reason why they were so unanimous—why, in fact, there was so great a preponderance of praise, and so little condemnation, in that contemporary opinion which historians have reflected with such servility. After all, Gladstone was Chancellor in the only coalition of the Victorian period. Everybody of importance was his colleague, except Derby, whose importance was not excessive, and Disraeli, whom nobody was yet taking quite seriously. Consequently, everybody of importance was interested in praising Gladstone—and they all did it, in the Victorian grand manner. The Victor-

ians, when they liked to be unanimous, were capable of making a chorus loud enough to deafen historical judgment for a long time afterwards.

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At all events, Gladstone's reputation was made, and it lasted him for the rest of his life (and in spite of some bad financial blunders), much as the reputation which Palmerston made over the Belgian Question lasted him until his death thirty-five years later. It was made while finance was his chief concern, and it lasted into a period when he had more opportunity than finance usually allows for showing a firm grasp of the broad principles of statesmanship. What were the broad principles which Gladstone applied to Parliamentary Reform and the Irish Question?

In the history of Parliamentary Reform, at any rate, Gladstone can scarcely be regarded as one of the prime factors. It is true, of course, that he was the author of two of the three big Victorian Reforms, but the acts of 1884 and 1885 are in reality one, and the second of them was merely an afterthought of Gladstone's, intended principally as a sop to the upper class Cerberus from whom the act of 1884 threatened to filch the last poor fragments of the bone of political supremacy. The redistribution of 1885 was only accepted by the Conservatives because it did something, at least, to neutralise the franchise reform of 1884; and Gladstone's right to be regarded as a leader of Victorian reform is therefore no more than this, that he accepted Disraeli's democracy of 1867 and gave it some sort of logical coherency, and then consented to have that logical coherency modified to suit the Conservatives, who were willing to give votes to their agricultural

labourers only under a guarantee that they should return landowning representatives to Parliament. Thus the history of Victorian Reform is reduced to the absurdity that Disraeli invented a democracy which he was ever afterwards trying to counteract, while Gladstone secured a logical extension of that democracy only by agreeing at the same time to make his extension largely nugatory. The Reform of 1867 was passed merely in order to dish the Whigs: and the Reform of 1884-5 assumed the shape it did merely in order to satisfy the party claims of Liberals and Conservatives. Party, and not the state, was throughout the paramount consideration.

That leaves us with the Irish Question as a means of establishing Gladstone's greatness. People who remember the last years of Victorian politics are apt to regard Gladstone as first and foremost the author of Home Rule, and in this connection it is important to remind ourselves that in the matter of Home Rule Gladstone was a failure. He split his party by adopting it, and then he failed to carry it through. Moreover, he was himself opposed to the whole principle, and he adopted Home Rule as a party policy, not because he believed in it, but because it was forced upon him. He appealed to the country in 1885 for a majority which should make him independent of Parnell and the Irish Party. That majority was not forthcoming, and Parnell was left master of the Parliamentary situation. Then, and not till then, Gladstone abandoned his principles rather than abandon Downing Street. He had gone to the country declaring that the obstinacy of Parnell was getting in the way of the conduct of government; he asked to be freed from the Irish incubus in order to devote himself to the things that, from the English point of view, mattered far more

than Home Rule for Ireland; and when he found that without the Irish vote he would have to resign, he executed one of those intellectual curvatures at which he was so clever, and used the votes of 335 Liberals who had been returned to shelve Home Rule, in order to defeat the 249 Conservatives who had been returned for the same purpose. This was the sort of thing for which Gladstone afterwards thanked God that he possessed an unusual

> "insight into the facts of particular eras, and their relation one to another, which generates in the mind a conviction that the materials exist for forming a public opinion and for directing it to a particular end."

In this case the particular end was Home Rule; and the materials out of which he proposed to form a public opinion in its favour were those 335 Liberals who had been elected to evade it. In fact, Gladstone's boast of insight and capacity for forming public opinion was little more than the Victorian Oxford manner of claiming to be a brilliant political tactician.

It is a pity, of course, to permit this sort of consideration to obscure such merits as there were in Gladstone's Irish statesmanship. His Irish Land Act of 1870 was a good piece of work. It laid down a new principle by recognising tenant-right, and in spite of the necessity for subsequent amendment which even Gladstone found to be considerable, it ought, undoubtedly, to weigh heavily in his favour. But the Land Act of 1870, like the Budget of 1853, was an isolated performance; and when we look in Gladstone's statesmanship for broad principles, we find only the broad principle of Party First. It was the party interests of the Liberals which precipitated Irish Disestablishment in 1869. Disestablishment

was the only possible alternative to the Conservative policy of concurrent endowment; and although concurrent endowment would have been far more satisfactory to Catholics and Protestants alike in Ireland, and to most Churchmen in England including the Queen, Disestablishment was carried rather than give the Conservatives the prestige of having the better plan.

So, in the next two years, with the new imperialism. It was highly distasteful to Gladstone, who determined to resist it, and only changed his mind when he realised that the Liberal Party would suffer quite as much as the Empire if he persisted in neglecting the latter. Immediately after their election in 1868, the Liberals began acting up to expectations with a policy which aimed at colonial independence as soon as it could be safely achieved; and in pursuance of that policy they continued to withdraw military forces from New Zealand even during the Maori wars of 1869. This naturally led to vigorous protest at home, and Gladstone began to wonder whether he was not endangering his party as well as the state. He therefore devoted the winter to a tactful exploration of public opinion; and as the result of his investigations he reversed his colonial policy early in 1870, and appeared as the champion of imperial unity. It was this brazen *volte face* which *The Spectator* branded as "a deathbed repentance of the ministry—a repentance that came only just in time to secure its salvation."

This, then, is the essential condemnation of Gladstone's statesmanship—that in spite of its sporadic excellences, its only principle was the principle of clinging to office, the principle that the fundamentals of political achievement were to be

made subservient to party, the mere machinery of politics. The condemnation extends, moreover, to Victorian politics in general in its most characteristic period, since Disraeli was no more innocent than Gladstone of the same sort of thing—and, indeed, took less pains than Gladstone to disguise his inconsistency. For six years after the repeal of the Corn Laws, Disraeli waited on events before he would declare his mind on the question of Free Trade; it was only when he realised in the early 'fifties that adherence to Protection would kill the Tory party, that he fell into line and became an avowed Free Trader; and thus, in the interests of his party, he accepted the principle which he had overthrown Peel for defending, and in order to oppose which he had himself broken the party in two. Similarly, in 1867, he forced on the country a reform which nobody wanted, again for the sake of Conservatism and, on his own showing, against the interests of the state. And finally, there is the spectacle of his neck-and-neck race with Gladstone in the early 'seventies for the sponsorship of the newer Imperialism—which he eventually adopted as much in order to neutralise his own reform act as for any other purpose. With Disraeli, again, it would be absurd to deny that he did some very good things; his frank acceptance, for example, of the realism of modern politics in his purchase of the Suez Canal shares —the gold of which has never lost its value in international currency; and even if the gilt of "Peace with Honour" became tarnished soon afterwards, at least there will always be many to congratulate him on the momentary prestige which he obtained for England and for himself by the Treaty of Berlin. But these, too, are isolated achievements, and again

the search for principle succeeds only in discovering the precedence of party over national interests.

There is an obvious superficial analogy between these tergiversations of the middle-Victorian politicians and the three great "betrayals" of Peel—two of which took place before the reign began. But the analogy is certainly no more than superficial. There is this fundamental difference to take into account—that whereas Peel accepted both Catholic Emancipation and Parliamentary Reform because he believed that refusal would mean revolution, and Free Trade because he believed that in opposing it his party was wrong, Disraeli and Gladstone turned their coats for precisely the opposite reason. In each of his three "treasons," Peel was betraying his party in what he conceived to be the interests of the state. The Middle Victorians, on the contrary, betrayed the state and their own elastic consciences in what they conceived to be the interests of party. In the case of Peel, the claims of statesmanship forbade loyalty to party; in the case of both Gladstone and Disraeli, their passion for party prevented their achieving a real statesmanship. It was the era of political machinery, and pride in the machinery blinded it to its betrayal of its own ultimate aims.

With that we are back at Arnold; and perhaps we can do no better than finish as it began this survey of Victorian statesmanship—by repeating that we mean by "Victorianism" what Arnold meant by "Philistinism":—

> "On the side of beauty and taste, vulgarity; on the side of morals and feeling, coarseness; on the side of mind and spirit, unintelligence—this is Philistinism."

There is no need to labour the vulgarity; it includes

not only antimacassars but the oil which made them necessary—and hair-oil sedulously applied was Disraeli's last means of political self-advertisement, as lace-trimmings were his first. So, too, on the side of morals and feeling, there is a coarseness in the parade of piety, whether evangelical or ritualistic, which marked the later Victorians as surely as the coarseness which marked the earlier Victorians, with their anxiety either to let things alone or to meddle everywhere, and in any case to say "damn" at every available opportunity. It was this coarseness which lay at the root of Victorian hypocrisy, since it compelled a profession of morality too heavy for its professors to bear.

But above all, Victorian statesmanship is branded as unintelligent, in spite of the molecular versatility of Gladstone and the cosmic versatility of Disraeli. These men were unintelligent because they were all mind and no spirit; because Gladstone, even in his most spiritual moments, was merely academic —except when he was merely disingenuous, which is often the same thing; and because Disraeli was never more than fertile in immediate resource. There is no need to repeat the counts in the charge against them. Whether it was Palmerston blustering into hostilities and blustering out again; or Russell forfeiting to his own conceit the ambitions of a lifetime; or Disraeli jumping over the precipice of reform into the waters of democracy, and then clinging in desperation to a new imperialism which he failed to make really new; or Gladstone adopting reform in order to be even with Disraeli, and adopting Home Rule in order to keep his office—in all these cases there is the fundamental unintelligence of men who are blinded, by the exigencies of the moment, to ultimate realities, and who prefer moving

in a circle to standing aside and taking their bearings. That is the essential unintelligence of Philistines or Victorians, and it is that which condemns not only their *bourgeoisie* but also their statesmanship.

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